

Identity Formation, Newcomer Dynamics and Organisational Change in a Higher Educational Institution

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Abstract

Keywords: Branding; Strategy; Identity Formation; Newcomer; Complex Responsive Process of Relating; Power Relationships; Reflexivity; Vagueness.

Key Authors: S. Albert & D. Whetten; D. Aaker; A. Giddens; R. Stacey; P. Bourdieu; M. Foucault; G.H. Mead; N. Elias; K. Weick; J. Habermas; J. Scott; E. Goffman; I. Burkitt.

This research looks at the dynamics of identity formation in a higher education organisation during a strategic branding project, the arrival of a newcomer and my role as the dean of a school of art and design. Most branding literature focuses on the key stages of how a brand proposition is formed and assumes the straightforward roll out of the identity for the organisation. In this research I focus on what goes on around me as ideas are formed and presented back to the organisation, rather than on the idealised process of what should go on. The method takes a “withness” approach to the narrative rather than a synoptic case study approach, focusing on my experience and practice. This highlights the social context of organisational life – the context of human power relationships in which people enable and constrain each other on the basis of human attributes such as identities, anxieties, values, emotions, fear, expectations, motives and interests. The research shows that intention is only a part of the narratives about strategy and identity in organisations. I argue that notions of certainty that are inherent in intentional brand strategies are often based on arbitrary inferences and that by nature brand propositions are abstractions and therefore only representative of a partial reality. To present them in a rigid sense and develop vigilant strategies for identity preservation seems artificially limiting and devoid of context.

Branding has played an important role in the world of objects and transactions. It has indicated a sense of ownership, a promise of quality and performance, and more recently an indication of self-image and identity. Yet when branding is *applied to organisations* it is problematic. Taking principles from a context of objects and applying them to social life has led to branding often being about the preservation of a

specific concept of identity and not about the ongoing dynamic process of identity formation in organisations. It is frequently seen as manipulative and controlling, yet is also seen as an important indicator of personality, differentiation, togetherness and is linked to notions of loyalty and trust.

Paralleling Mead's notion of the "I-me" dialectic, an organization can also be seen to be emerging in the context in terms of its presentation in everyday life. The notion of certainty in this sense of organizational identity denies the dynamics of the situation and one could argue that vagueness is present in all aspects of social life and essential for creative action as it allows space for newness. Any articulation of identity is a simplification of an identity that is constantly evolving. But at what level are these simplifications and abstractions useful and not debilitating? This is not to argue that intention and strategy are not essential parts of joint action. The process of negotiating is an essential part of working together towards joint action. It is a process in which we reveal our intent and discover important aspects about each other and ourselves as we emerge in the social; it is about intention and attention. However we cannot really know how people will respond to our gestures and actions, and it is in the actions that we reveal the sincerity of our intent. Managers and strategies do not solely determine organisational identity, and neither are employees free to choose their identities, attitudes, expectations and actions. We are both enabled and constrained by our own pasts and social relationships. We inform the organisational identity as well as being informed by it in an on going process of relating.

This way of thinking has implications for the way that we think about brand strategy in organisations – it is not a deterministic process of control, and neither is it a process of anarchic behavior, of open resistance to management intention. Branding is a social act and is performed by human agents who are inherently complex, individual and collective at the same time. The role of the practitioner is to make sense of what is going on between us and pay attention to what emerges – after all, it is not what a brand is but what a brand does.

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Introduction

The following advertisement for McGraw-Hill Publishing first ran in Business Week in 1958. It was written by John Peebles, Creative Director at Adler Boshetto Peebles



*"I don't know who you are.
I don't know your company.
I don't know your company's product.
I don't know what your company stands for.
I don't know your company's customers.
I don't know your company's record.
I don't know your company's reputation.
Now—what was it you wanted to sell me?"*



MORAL: Sales start **before** your salesman calls—with business publication advertising.

McGRAW-HILL MAGAZINES
BUSINESS • PROFESSIONAL • TECHNICAL

and Partners and is frequently named as one of the top ten advertisements of that decade. I have used this advertisement both in my lectures and in presentations to persuade companies about the importance of branding to their organisation. I have worked for many decades as a design and brand consultant, and whereas I am convinced that it is important for organisations to be aware that what they say about

themselves and what they do are extremely important and inextricably linked activity, I have become increasingly skeptical of some of the principles that seem to underpin branding practices. Branding is seen as an indicator of the personality of the organisation and *applied* vigilantly in a manner that implies a single, uni-minded organisation simplified to a series of simple propositions, colours and fonts. There is often a loose link made to the strategy of the organisation and its vision and values without much of a discussion about what this actually means. Recent years have seen higher education establishments investing in branding consultants in an attempt to demonstrate the unique identity of the university with an aim to developing deeper relationships with their *clients*.

Context

This research looks at the process of strategic branding in a higher education establishment in the United Kingdom. The research aims to make sense of what went on for me as the head of art and design in the university during the process of an external consultant coming into develop a branding strategy. The focus is from a personal, subjective perspective and aims to look at the messiness of real life, the interactions that take place, the power relationships, the gossip and the anxiety that arises during the process. The research is an inquiry into how I understood the process as a senior manager from a socio-political and psychological perspective. I do so by raising critical questions about the everyday social interactions that take place all of the time and reflecting on the relationship between strategy, branding and identity, both my own individually and the university's as an organisation. My argument is that identity formation is an ongoing complex process and that traditional management approaches to branding oversimplifies and freezes identity rather than view things dynamically. The perspective of complex responsive processes provides a way of making sense of the often paradoxical, ambiguous, arbitrary nature of identity formation in which the abstractions and simplifications of branding are only part of the complex narratives that reveal something about who we are and what we are doing together. Life is happening all of the time and by focusing on what we are doing together as we carry out our daily duties perhaps reveals something about who we are, what we stand for and what we aspire to do.

From a traditional management perspective, in which a brand identity is deduced from senior management conversations, an examination of advertising material and conversations with clients and customers, we are presented with an oversimplified and static view of the world. I demonstrate that things are much more complex and messier, and if branding is a social term, then it needs to be viewed from a social perspective which captures the dynamic, complex, and psychological nature of the process, and the anxieties, power and control inherent in all human relationships. Branding in this sense becomes part of the narrative rather than the exclusive narrative, vigilantly policed. This is not to argue that brand strategy, intent and aspirations are not an important part of the conversation, but they are not the only conversations taking place.

As the research unfolds it becomes clear that the narratives presented are also about executive newcomers and some of the impacts that they have on personal and organisational identities. The research is therefore about my role as a principal of an art and design school, the impact of executive newcomers and the dynamics of identity formation and strategic branding.

Format

This thesis is not structured as a conventional research project. It is still very much research, but from a subjective point of view in which four narrative projects are presented. The first project is an exploration of my experiences growing up and how I came to think the way I think. The aim is to take my own experiences seriously and also present them for critique and examination. Practice is by nature reflective and reflexive, and so the purpose is to develop a better understanding of my management practice and how it has changed over the years. The research then continues by presenting three more projects with narrative inquiries developed around three critical incidents over three years from 2010 to 2012 during which I was Head of Art & Design in the university. Although the projects were iterated at the time in conjunction with a community of inquirers, I have not rewritten anything retrospectively. This is purposeful in an attempt to demonstrate the movement of my thinking over time. The detail and quality of the writing develops from project to

project and provides an indication of how my experiences change as I begin to pay attention to the complex interactions in my day-to-day activity.

Project One presents a summary of my growing up and ends with my arrival as the Head of Art & Design to the University and the first few months in which I had to perform as a manager.

Project Two continues at the University with a focus on the senior management of the organisation and the processes of strategising that went on and my role in trying to discuss strategic branding.

Project Three then develops the narrative as I come back to the art school and focuses on what is going on around me as the brand strategists do their work of collecting data and mirroring back to the organisation.

Project Four was when I realised that the research was also about the role of the executive newcomer as we deal with a new Vice Chancellor coming into the University and their role in strategising and identity formation. The project really brings to light the complex dynamics of human interrelating.

Lastly I present a synopsis and critical appraisal in which I reflect on the four projects and develop ideas around the research method, my understanding of complex responsive processes, strategy and organisational branding. I believe the research demonstrates how identity is not just about what we say we do, but also about what we do and the way that we do it. It is a social process in which we emerge, forming the process and being formed by it at the same time.

The work by nature is exposing and so the names have been changed to protect the innocent.

Project One

This project begins a journey into making sense of my practice as a manager. It starts to engage with a personal narrative of key moments in my life that have formed my mental models and views of the world, either explicitly or implicitly. Mental models are formed through personal experiences and interactions that occur throughout one's life. The philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset suggests that there is no me without things and things are nothing without me. His famous maxim 'Yo soy yo y mi circunstancia' summed up his core philosophy that the human cannot be detached from their circumstances. He introduced the concept of 'historical reason' arguing that individuals (and society) are not detached from their past (Ortega y Gasset 1984) (Ortega y Gasset 1956).

To reflect on my own practice as head of an art and design school I need to look at my own history and what has shaped it.

The Early Years

I was born in India to a middle class Brahmin family at the home my grandfather built. He was the patriarch of both the family and learning community in the area, an academic who ran tutorials from the family home. He encouraged a dharmic, ethical existence and was enormously respected. I was used to an inter-generational and hierarchical society with clear roles and clear power structures. My grandfather was an academic and ran many tutorials from the family home. Learning was an important aspect of life, as were good manners, politeness and openness to inquiry.

When I was about six we moved to the UK. I did not speak any English, and stood out because of the colour of my skin, my vegetarianism, and the clothes I wore, mainly hand-me-downs. It seems that I quickly decided to blend in and engage with Englishness in an attempt not to stand out. By the time I reached comprehensive school I was effectively accent-less, participating in school sports and engaging with Western music and film, and in some respects turning away from my own culture. I was also lucky: I didn't need to work hard at attaining good grades. Early on, I was seduced by the beauty of mathematics, how there was not only elegance in it but also

‘answers’. I was the classic product of a scientific paradigm, believing that there was an algorithm for everything. Learning was an important part of our culture, and my brother and sister had both gone onto university, the first people from our school to get into higher education. I don’t recall anything being said, but for some reason I decided I needed to get sponsorship. Due to my strengths in physics and mathematics, engineering was the obvious choice. Trying to make sense of this now I note that my outlook was very much in line with the Indian stereotype: respect for hierarchy yet not that keen on rules; comfortable with ambiguity and paradoxes; interested in the logic of mathematics. I think I also demonstrated the classic behaviours of a recent immigrant, the concerns about identity and wanting to belong.

Engineering

I got three sponsorship offers: Rolls Royce, British Telecom and Michelin. I decided to go with British Telecom as they paid the most, and it was an exciting time in telecommunications with digital just coming in and BT’s privatization. I also managed to get a place at Emmanuel College, Cambridge. The Telecom sponsorship meant taking a year out and working in all aspects of BT as part of an accelerated management training programme. There were 32 students in total, 17 of whom were at Oxbridge. All of a sudden, I was no longer in the top of the group. This had a profound impact on my confidence and it was not really until the final year, when I started to play lacrosse for the university, that I started to feel more comfortable with myself. I think playing a team sport – knowing where I belonged – was an important aspect of confidence building. I also become very conscious of how some people were not only good at their subject, played sport but also had fantastic social skills. I had really only focused on the typical engineering subjects, like a good Indian boy. Here there were people who were good law students and also managed to perform standup comedy at a high level.

At university many people had a lot more money, came from a very privileged background and had had significantly more opportunities than I had in terms of extracurricular activities. I also discovered that some people worked incredibly hard. There were the occasional gifted people, but what struck me most was that some people worked all the time and also got extremely stressed. I had never really

encountered this before. There was some rapid growing up to do. A key realization for me was discovering that the world was no longer deterministic, and that there was more to life than algorithms. On the other hand, my mathematical skills had positioned me in the quality department at British Telecom, developing sampling tables and failure models. It was hugely uninspiring and I started to plan my exit. After finishing my studies and working for a short time, I handed in my notice to Telecom and accepted a position as a communications consultant in the architectural engineering and construction (AEC) industry.

Trades and Professions

I started working as a design engineer in the architectural engineering and construction industry (AEC). The AEC industry in terms of practice interests me. We seem to have so much experience in doing it, and there are so many academic institutes studying it, producing processes, procedures, policies, stages and checklists, yet most projects still run late, go over budget, result in conflict, litigation and often poor outputs. Reflecting back on this time I am struck by the range of people I worked with: the various social groups, class structures, education levels and wealth levels, from the tradespeople doing the construction through to the landed gentry providing the property development finance. Client project meetings were always fraught – but then a system that has a ‘master-servant’ relationship, that is set up to be combative, will be stressful. Even when theory from the Human Relations School was applied to this scientific management approach and vision and values meetings were conducted, the groups did not always function well. Bohm suggests that for good dialogue to take place, one needs an awareness of one’s own assumptions in order to be open to others [Bohm and Nichol (1996)]. This was never presented in these sessions. The nearest a facilitator would get to it would be suggesting the ‘suspension of criticism’ as one of the ground rules. Much like my experiences with brainstorming, I have found it rare for these idealized processes to actually work in practice. Bohm himself thought that dialogue was virtually impossible in hierarchical organisations [Stacey (2007)].

The industry has been looking at its own ways of working, either in methods of procurement [Rowlinson and McDermott (1999)] or in the way that teams are formed. Both show a movement towards a systems approach to management that accounts for

what they refer to as the ‘soft’ side of management, ie the people. This is a move away from a cybernetics view and a move towards soft systems thinking which makes a point of looking at the interactions between the parties as well as the context. However, it still does not take into account any real human aspects of behaviour and assumes that we all behave rationally and with the same common purpose. Even though considerable work has been done towards developing a social model of the process based on Senge (1990) and Gharajedaghi (1999) there are still limitations, especially if one takes a socio-political view of the process. Not all parties are equal and power struggles take place, decisions are unclear and it still seems to be about who can ‘shout’ the loudest. The models do bring in the concepts of a community approach and teamwork and have resulted in a legal contract (the Collaborative Working Agreement) based on a social model of gainshare and painshare, but there are still elements of ‘people’ – particularly creative people – that the models do not take into account.

Design

Working with some architects we designed desks for dealer rooms, floor outlet boxes, and light fittings and I was far more taken by this than the engineering side. I decided to go back to university and study product design. This time university was less of a shock in terms of context, but the content was a radical change. Where I had been used to having an innate understanding of how equations worked and how algorithms led to answers, I found that design took time and required a different way of thinking. The briefs that were given were open-ended – one was simply ‘think of something and make it’. These open-ended briefs were initially daunting but after a while I started to put on my own constraints – based on personal preference to start with but then on observation and basic market research. More by intuition I started to formalize my design process.

With far more experience of design schools now I find that design education falls into two categories which are probably easier to explain through the analogy of music: in the first the students are taught the components of design and practice these like scales in music; in the second, you are handed a guitar and told to play, rewarded for pleasant sounds and told to do something else for less savoury pieces. My design

education seemed to fit into the latter and relied on learning through doing and in some cases osmosis. Design was taught as this magical process and at the time I did not really question the process and the way that I worked though it. We had done it enough times for it to become second nature to us – and overall, it seemed to work. The formal sessions were in model making and in history and contextual studies. The former I enjoyed as it got me into the craft of design, the latter I came to love. As a teenager I had never understood the point of history. My father had instilled in me the ability to derive equations; to go to first principles and build answers from there rather than recite equations. History to me was all about recall. I passed it, but I didn't really get it. Design school changed all of that. I was now interested in why people did what they did. Instead of equations I was interested in 'learning' in its broader sense: where things had come from and what had come before – a more heuristic based approach. I read more broadly, engaging in other 'softer' sciences and disciplines. I wanted to learn more about how things work. In Feynman's autobiography, his father states that naming something isn't the same as knowing about it [Feynman and Robbins (1999)]. Even in physics, the history of a particle was essential to understanding its future behaviour.

I graduated and worked as a design consultant. In 1994 I answered an advertisement to set up a consultancy within a New Zealand university – a shop window into their product design and development department. NB, who was resident designer for Minolta cameras and Seiko watches, and alleged inventor of the game ConnectFour, interviewed me. The world of design has a number of these cult figures. I had first encountered them in architecture and looking back now can see how influential these people are within their domains, and sometimes beyond. I ended up heading to New Zealand on a three-year contract.

I had a growing awareness of systems in terms of product systems – a chair was made up of some vertical feet elements, a sitting element and a vertical back element, but it was the variety in these and the various combinations that resulted in an infinite number of designs. Notions of complexity and mutants were coming into the vocabulary and I was starting to build up an intuitive understanding of aesthetics and the role of proportion in making or breaking a design. The designer Charles Eames had stated that the three most important elements of design were the connections, the

connections and the connections. Connections and relationships between elements, certainly in a physical sense, became the focus of a lot of my design activity. At first this was related to the physical object, but it was not long before I started to take more notice of the connections in the social objects around me. I was starting to become far more aware of the importance of relationships, both personal and professional and how they impacted on enjoyment, success, enthusiasm and openness to ideas. My personal life was going to take a big test with the move to New Zealand and in some ways it also gave me the opportunity to make new connections and perhaps reinvent myself in the process.

Biculturalism

A number of things happened in this period of my life. Until now I had worked with my managers behaving ethically with me. This was about to change and I was to learn at first hand the unusual politics that go on in academia. I was also to engage in a society that had consciously established itself as ‘bicultural’ as a nod to its Maori past and its European colonizers. I also got paid to research more explicitly.

Biculturalism interested me initially. Maori had a system of values that looked towards the land, that valued family (whanau) and ancestors – there was some resonance with my Hindu upbringing. I used some of the motifs, the koru or spiral, in some of my early furniture designs but was accused of appropriation. This was rather frustrating. Even though New Zealand does not appear that different from the UK, I was hoping to be exposed to new cultures and new languages, but I soon found that Maori culture was not for sharing. I managed to argue my way out of the appropriation argument by saying that it was also an Indian motif as shown in the paisley pattern. I found that the ‘culture’ had been frozen and was being protected, not only by Maori but also by many Europeans who seemed to feel guilty about the colonial past. In general I did not feel any aspects of exclusion, but found that being in New Zealand increased my confidence in my own culture and myself. Bhabha (1994) argues that colonialism is not something locked in the past but constantly intrudes on the present resulting in the emergence of new cultural forms. The British had been in India for centuries and I suppose that I was relatively comfortable with the Indian culture and that it had been robust enough to develop in its own way.

Working with an American project manager, I established a product design and branding consultancy. There was no budget, no premises and at that stage no other staff. We enlisted the help of recent graduates and postgraduate students and made connections with local companies and business support agencies. We were both social people and got a number of projects off the ground. The postgraduate projects really took off and we started to get sponsored projects that significantly increased student numbers. It was an exciting, challenging and incredibly fun year. We worked with young companies who have gone on to become internationally famous. It felt like the Wild West and we were making it all up as we went along. Eighteen months into the three-year contract the head suddenly left. I was asked to pick up the postgraduate studies work and then more and more of the teaching commitments. I got sucked into academia and into higher management.

We tried design once, it didn't work.

Of the projects we started with companies, only some followed the path originally envisaged. Strategic choice theory seemed to form the basis of our practice – it assumes a realist position in that there is a pre-given reality – and we increasingly found ourselves improvising. I started to feel less and less comfortable with some of the models and looked around for others.

At design school, the process model described by Archer seemed the predominant model of the design process: research leading to analysis, then to a creative leap, then a product and on to evaluation, with a happy client at the end of it [Archer (1965)]. This same model was used by McKinsey consulting group and given the grand title of Stage Gate Processing. I had certainly used the model: it was great for breaking up projects into stages for billing purposes, and, cynically, for showing how far behind we were in the initial timeline, but it did not seem to inform the thinking process. The more I looked the more I found the process models to be lacking in detail. Moore identified a seven step process based on the work of management consultants [Moore and Pessemier (1993)]. Some of these were intellectual and organizational rather than just the physical steps detailed in [Ulrich and Eppinger (1995)]. I found that people only generally followed these processes. They started off with good intentions, but

often the process was individualized, especially with regards to the decision-making stages. Although some studies concluded that companies that adhered to the process showed more product completions [Cooper & Kleinschmidt (1992)] it was not clear what ‘product completions’ actually meant. The processes presented effectively a broad timeline of the activities but did not capture the ‘messiness’ of the process and conveyed a false impression that one function followed another; quite often there would be iterative loops that were conducted in reality but never logged or monitored. None of the literature talked about the messiness or acknowledged the role of people in the process. If the process was so important, why didn’t we have better products and why were some people and organisations so much better at it than others?

Another key factor I struggled with was that these processes started with the assumption that we knew what it was that we wanted to make – there was no stage 0. Reinerstein (1997) introduced the concept of the **fuzzy front end**, the part of the process right at the very beginning where we don’t even know what it is that we are going to design. At the same time, I came across the design funnel [Hayes, Wheelwright et al. (1988)] which presented a far more fluid model of the design process. While it captured more of the idea of funneling and channeling ideas and added the opportunity for more iterative behaviour, it still did not capture the fuzzy front end. I started to develop my own models for teaching purposes that combined the fuzzy front end with a more analogue model, and added a **fuzzy back end** to think about the advertising, distribution and ultimate acceptance of the products [Sharma (2000) (2002)]. The models mixed media as the process unfolded – the reified ideas would become concepts that would turn into prototypes that would turn into products. Once again, it was the messy ends that interested me, where lateral creativity and insight played major roles and, for me, this was highly dependent on the people involved. I started to engage with the literature of management at this stage and the role of senior management, particularly in new product development. The role of senior management seemed to be in setting the parameters and direction and then guiding and motivating the staff [Tidd, Bessant et al. (2005); Burgelman, Maidique et al. (2001)]. Peters and Waterman were the key social influencers of the dominant theory at that stage, with numerous academics copying their methodologies for business success and narrowing them down to a series of bullet points [Peters and Waterman (1982)]. This was further developed in 1994 with Collins and Porras

(1994) introducing the phrase ‘from good to great’ into the business vocabulary. It gave some simple directions and simple things to do. They struck me as quick fix, airport best sellers but did not give me any insight into the processes and in particular how insights happened and how meaning was made. How come some people and organisations were better at it than others? This was a recurring question that I kept coming back to.

In 1998 I moved to Auckland to set up a new course in design management, now based in an art school rather than a technology institute. It was here that I engaged more directly with craft practice and that metaphor was to influence a lot of my reading and consulting work over the next few years. Sennett (2008) talks about the importance of the craft ideal, not only in our relationship to the ‘material’ but also in the values that drive our work - enjoying the process as well as the outcomes. For the new job there was no budget, no material, no curriculum. I had to establish things from scratch, and recruit a full cohort of students to justify my post. I tried to develop a compelling narrative and decided to surround myself with interesting people who were focused on creativity and innovation, as this would be the core of the new course. I was also keen to bring in the human systems thinking elements. I met Nick Marsh who had written a book called *Theory K* in which he talked about harnessing the entrepreneurial spirit in New Zealanders [Marsh (1994)]. It led me to MS a management consultant with expertise in soft systems methodology [Checkland (1981); Checkland and Scholes (1990)]. Through him I met DR an expert in systems modeling and we seemed to share common interests in complexity theory.

By now I had considerable experience of working with companies on design projects and design strategies. I seemed to have developed a role as a design counselor, working with CEOs to embed design practice into organisations. I was keen to avoid the ‘we tried design once, it didn’t work’ comments by ensuring a good learning model was developed for each company and that design capabilities were built along good lines. This was mainly intuitive at this stage, but later on systems thinking would inform my practice more explicitly.

Explicitly Systems

DR introduced me to iThink software based on the work of Jay Forrester. The software allowed you to model qualitative information with quantitative data. At first this really appealed to my electronic engineering brain and I found that Business Process Reengineering all seemed to make sense with this software. We consulted with companies such as LazyBoy using the software to model changes we were asked to make to the product development systems. However, I found that if the models were to be useful, they became more and more complex, so much so that we confused both our clients and ourselves. We also ended up so focused on the modeling data that real data was seen as erroneous when it conflicted. The model was taking over.

Stacey (2007) provides an overview of the various viewpoints in systems thinking and argues that this cybernetic approach aims to control the situation by trying to analyse where best to intervene in the system. In some situations it was very useful, but it did not take into account the people in the group, their personal histories and the interactions between them. It still assumed that any person coming into that system would contribute to the same results.

The Fifth Discipline [Senge (1990)] was influential in my thinking at the time as there were elements in the book which fitted in with the craft metaphor that I was engaged in and also placed a strong emphasis on learning. The concept of a multi-minded machine presented a more social model of branding rather than the uni-minded machine of classic brand literature [Gharajedaghi (1999)]. Open systems theory was the next step in the discovery and I became more interested in the elements of the system – ie the people and the role that they played (often sub-consciously) in the success or otherwise of the projects. At the time this just seemed a natural part of getting older, of becoming more experienced in the ‘craft’ of design and hence improvising and filling in the gaps where I needed to sub-consciously, and also a natural part of getting more senior in the organisation. My job changed, no longer on the drawing board and less and less involved in directing projects, my role was now to ‘lead’, to establish cultures in groups that would be open to creativity and learning, to ‘manage’ relationships, to motivate people into delivering projects.

Systems thinking was a useful metaphor and framework for discussions, but it did not help in coming up with ideas or new ways of doing things. Intuitively I had always worked on the relationships between people and at the micro level of interaction while also being aware of an overarching strategy. Over the years my role became managing the anxiety of the group, playing the peacemaker and establishing a safe place for ideas to be discussed. Sometimes I was the provocateur. I found myself in the social system as a person of influence, through a combination of hierarchy, status and personality. Humans have choice and can quite often circumvent systems. Elias and Schrotter (1991) say that human interactions are less tightly bound by organically prescribed paths. The study of ants led Brown & Duguid (2000) to comment that ants don't suddenly form unions (that we know of) or go on strike, or stay home to watch the football. Systems thinking was an eye opener for me and felt natural with my engineering and design education and practice, however, I still wondered about people and creativity and where new ideas would come from. This still seemed to rely on the individual. These are areas that I am hoping to explicitly explore through complex responsive processes and bringing in sociological and psychological aspects.

Creativity and Innovation

My studies and my practice started to focus on creativity and innovation. I read the popular design books: [De Bono (1992)] [Kao (1996)] [Michalko (1991)]. De Bono introduced the concept of lateral thinking, Kao used the metaphor of jazz (another craft-related activity) and Michalko brought in creative games to encourage creativity. But all they seemed to give me were more tools for generating more ideas and novelty. Psycho-dynamic approaches [Freud (1932)] and cognitive approaches [Amabile (1996)] provided some personality models of traits and behaviours, but it was the work of Csikszentmihalyi (1996) (1988) who piqued my interest by providing a confluence model that embedded creative practice in the context of what a system would accept. This at least had started to acknowledge the importance of the human system; even though the ideas/concepts may be fantastic, their success was based on the intangible aspects of human acceptance. In his seminal work, Wallas presented a study of mathematician Henri Poincaré as a creative genius [Wallas (1926)]. This was 'new' to the viewpoints of the artist as the owner of creativity that was being expounded in the art and design schools – ask people if they are creative and most of

them will comment on their drawing or painting ability. Poincaré himself was presented as one of the leading geniuses in history and the work led directly into a reading of complexity theory. It was interesting from a mathematical and metaphor perspective but it was unclear how it could inform my perspective.

A study of creativity led me to the knowledge management literature. At first I found the concept fairly meaningless; the phrase meant different things to different people and had become merged with other concepts of the knowledge economy such as “competing on competencies”, “building a learning organisation” and “leveraging intellectual capital”. Much of the literature also claimed that knowledge management offered a single technique for curing all the ills of ignorance in an organisation. The first generation of knowledge management approaches seemed to share the common assumption that knowledge was essentially the same as information: codified, structured data in a meaningful context, such as market research, customer contact information, news reports, and “lessons-learned” checklists. [Davenport & Prusak (1998)]. The second generation realised that much of any organisation’s knowledge (arguably the most important) is based in its people and cannot be readily collected or disseminated. Judgment, experience, skills, the previous learning of workers became the target of management approaches that sought techniques and processes to make the implicit explicit: to “extract” knowledge from people and codify it for dissemination and use by others [based on (Polanyi 1966)]. Sennett (2008) applies the craft metaphor to other areas of practice in which the context ‘talks’ back to the craftsman allowing a dialogue to happen. Mintzberg [Mintzberg, Ahlstrand et al. (2009)] also talked about strategy as a craft process – making strategic planning more of a fluid process in which one does something and then reacts to what the market does back. Improvisation is a key aspect of craft, but it also assumes an in depth knowledge of the context. A third generation faced the difficult task of extracting knowledge from people who might not have realised they had it. This generation developed techniques for fostering learning and exchange through more social approaches, such as expert networks, team-based organisational design and structured storytelling [Nonaka & Takeuchi (1995); Wenger (1998)]. This resonated for me as it was related to the process of generating insights for new product development.

At this stage I “left” thinking about these types of things and moved back to the UK. In looking for a new job, I went back to my “normal” practices and did not really think about my thinking. I was offered a job at the University of XX with the previous head I had in New Zealand – the devil I knew!

Senior Management

I became the new head of art and design in a newly formed faculty, Creative & Cultural Industries at the University of XX. We were in the process of moving from the main campus to a new building in the centre of the city. I was given the task of developing an identity for the School, ensuring sustainable undergraduate courses and building a research culture that would bring in external funding. I wanted to take time to get to know the staff, to get to know some of the history of the place, areas of expertise and get a better sense of the people dynamics in the School.

The city campus was promoted as a state of the art media building with theatre, cinema and professional television production studios. The only problem was that design studios were limited and there was no space for art – the Dean saw art as a dirty discipline and apparently never had plans to include it in the city move. My School was therefore to be separated into two, leaving art in run down facilities at the main campus and moving design to a shiny new building in the heart of the city. The project was severely delayed. The project managers and the Dean were in denial and had not made any contingency plans, so when the students were due to arrive the following week onto a building site with hard hat designation, we went into emergency planning mode. The local circus school, cinema and theatre were booked to provide some coverage, and we still had some building space at the main campus. This minor crisis had two opposite effects for my School: it brought the art staff closer together, and it brought out the cracks in the design staff, making them more competitive and less collaborative. The art staff were open and flexible in sharing their space and their modest facilities, but the design staff became extremely territorial and would not allow sharing of studios, equipment, even chairs. I started to review the degrees we were offering. There were three degrees in serious decline: architectural technology, architectural heritage and conservation and product design. The architectural degrees were run by refugees from the technology faculty who had

little philosophy in common with the other design degrees. It emerged that the two key staff members were both trying to leave – one retired and the other left for another job. The retiree had been there for many years and had just grown tired of being pushed into a corner and forgotten. I don't believe he was malicious in any way but had got into a pattern of behaviour that had sidelined him, raising both his anxiety levels and those of his managers. The other person had managed to alienate himself more aggressively. He saw no benefits in design, felt that computers had the answers and everything could be modeled. I spent a year trying to turn him to design, but in the end he decided to leave – with a personal grievance against me. Fortunately I had kept good records and nothing came of it, and conversations with peers indicated that it was par for the course.

I asked staff to instigate ideas for new degrees and new research areas. One person said he wanted to set up a postgraduate degree in animation; he had good contacts in the industry and good collaboration opportunities overseas. We developed a new degree from scratch and in the process we became good friends. When my wife and I stayed with his family, this produced tensions within the rest of the design department. Three members of staff in particular were 'jealous' of the relationship and saw favouritism in any projects that were developed. I took pains to work with them to make sure that they felt suitably supported and promoted. Most of the time the resentment was under the surface, but at pressure points throughout the year it would blow. A psychoanalytical explanation during periods of anxiety is that people often revert to infantile mechanisms [Klein & Mitchell (1986) cited in Stacey (2007)]. One day I had to call a staff meeting to basically tell people to grow up and not to victimise their colleague by not talking to him. When asked what the issues were, there was some general murmuring about something that had been done twelve years ago. From that day on the issue went underground but some damage had been done. These were actually the least of my problems. The Dean had become more manipulative and less able to socialize his ideas. Senior management was being sidelined and significant decisions were being made to close parts of the Faculty. The relationship between the Dean and Associate Dean became toxic, leading to a mutiny from the staff. Unfortunately the Dean had been here before and held his nerve to let things blow over. Fortunately I had been approached by another art school. It was a relief to hand in my notice and move to YY University.

YY School of Art and Design has a good reputation, the Vice Chancellor was very supportive and encouraging to me personally. The staff seemed to be generally okay, but there was a strange undercurrent. After a few days there, people started to open up: my predecessor had been a control freak and a bully. However, the Vice Chancellor had decided to keep him on to develop postgraduate facilities at one of our other campuses. For six years he had been head of the School and had alienated most of the staff and a number of the local partnerships in town. The staff had been numbed into a pattern of not thinking for themselves, not questioning anything. There was little laughter but there seemed to be general relief in that, at least, I was new. Rumours started to emerge about formal complaints of bullying that had been upheld with a number of payouts, but my predecessor had managed to hang in there. The explanation that was offered was that there was a Masonic handshake. This has come up a number of times at the University, and in the City in general, but there seems to be little evidence to support the claim. Having said that, everyone seems to take some comfort from this explanation, a “rational” explanation for when something does not make sense.

When the economy worsened and we had to make major staffing decisions, I felt better prepared both mentally and in terms of process having been through it before. I also had nine months of understanding of the School under my belt – I had consciously tried not to make too many strategic decisions without a better understanding of the place, the context, the people and the relationships within. My experience at XX made me want to build trust and collegiality at YY. I called an emergency staff meeting at beginning of the New Year and shared the budgets with all staff. I discussed the parameters and the drivers for the costs stating that we were a £7 million school but we cost £7.5 million to deliver it. Things had to change. I started to get people thinking about what type of school we were and what we wanted to be like, about five year plans, about our position and reputation in the art world. People were incredibly passive in the larger groups, so I started to see them in smaller groups. Individuals did not believe that their safe existence would be affected. People started to avoid me. Whereas we had got into a fairly social habit of saying hello in the corridors or meeting for coffee, suddenly the place felt empty. Walking around one day I heard a door slam and the door lock go. I turned round and knocked. The

technician who had locked himself in said that people were worried about talking to me in case I gave them bad news. This was starting to really affect not only the staff but also the students and I needed to speed things up.

The legal process for redundancy prescribes the development of a business case, a pooling of staff and then a reason for why that person or group of people are under risk of redundancy. The business case had already been signed off: we would increase student numbers without affecting quality, reduce an administrative layer of technicians and academics, remove technicians not doing significant work, remove academics left over from closed down courses. A number of the staff sympathized with me having to go through this process and said that they didn't take it personally. This really helped me through quite a stressful time. These people were losing their livelihood and they felt sorry for me in the process.

I am sure that I have changed some aspects of my practice, although I am doing essentially what I had to do at XX. However, it seems to have gone better here and we have set in motion a number of quite significant projects.

Conclusion

Looking back at the narrative I seem to have almost followed exactly the chapter headings in Stacey (2007) and now find myself engaging with the underpinning literature of the DMan programme, bringing in aspects of sociology and psychology, the elements that have been missing in my early education. My early years would have led to a practice based on an algorithmic approach to management, possibly even management information science, looking for an equation that would give me the answer. The movement in thinking towards a more heuristic approach, then a systems approach and now a complexity approach has been gradual and come about through an interplay of circumstances, work demands, chance meetings, additional reading, necessity and also a discomfort with algorithms applied to social systems.

In *Mind, Self and Society* Mead makes an important point:

‘[t]he evolutionary appearance of mind or intelligence takes place when the whole social process of experience and behaviour is brought within the experience of any one of the separate individuals implicated therein ... It is by means of reflexiveness – the turning back of experience of the individual upon himself – that the whole social process is thus brought into the experience of the individuals involved in it ... Reflexiveness, then, is the essential condition, within the social process, for the development of the mind.’ [Mead (1934)]

My practice has moved from one at project level where I was grappling with more traditional project management skills, but still becoming frustrated that these processes start from the premise that we know what we want at the end. My experiences from product design tell me that mostly we have a hint of what we want at the end and that the journey reveals other opportunities as we proceed along the path. Staying open to these moments of serendipity also allows for creative insights to be brought in. Unfortunately this method of improvisation or craft does not sit well with most management systems that are predicated on greater levels of certainty and control. My initial practice would have been based on an engineering paradigm, with a focus on prediction, control and optimization. As Stacey (2007) states this offers little space for human factors such as emotion and spontaneity, which could result in better practice. Strategic choice theory bases itself on a homogenous approach to management, assuming that we are all the same and will behave in the same way. This clearly is not true. My direct experience of moving from one art school to another has shown the massive difference that can occur in essentially the same practice. The management process is not a linear process based on logic and the management of entities, but a political process, taking place in a social setting. The inter-relationships and interdependencies can have quite unpredictable results depending on the richness of human behaviour, the human capacity to learn and change, group dynamics, politics, anxiety, ego, power dynamics and how these interact with each other. My day-to-day practice consists of theoretical strategizing at a management level and micro-management to “maintain” morale, encourage good behaviours, discourage inappropriate behaviours, calm anxieties and hope that the general strategy emerges from these interactions and the broader strategies and policies. In this more strategic role the role of the manager is to ‘build’ capable organisations that will perform well. In a media and information rich world, things

move fast and so the organisation is now based in turbulence that requires more agility, and the ability to change and improvise. The traditional theories on management were based on production line mentalities with perhaps a bit of basic motivational theory mixed in. My practice has never really been based on this approach. I think from an early stage I was aware of the importance of the human being and the relationships between them. Issues of identity, inclusion and exclusion were experienced at an early stage in my life and so an approach that is more human and craft based has been intuitive. My growing experience and moving up the management ladder has meant that I have naturally had to play different roles in the organisation – Mead's concept of the generalised other [Mead (1934)] comes to mind with regards to me consciously trying not to forget how I felt when in those roles.

My career path moving into art and design, in hindsight, seems to make perfect sense. Art and design are concerned with the making of the new, with novelty and with the concept of emergence through play and practice. They also both allow for narrative and post rationalization. At this level the concept of complexity makes perfect sense too, but as soon as we bring in people other dynamics come into play. What these processes haven't had for me has been a greater awareness of people and how they work, individually, in groups and in society. Complex responsive processes would appear to be the next stage of inquiry and sensemaking for me.

Project Two: Organisational Identity

This project explores issues of identity, particularly corporate identity, in a university. I want to explore aspects of management that affect identity particularly regarding branding. The concept of identity is interesting in a number of ways: in marketing terms to the external audience; in cultural terms in affecting behaviour; in strategic terms in setting an agenda for the future; and in very basic terms of who we are and what we do.

‘From a complex responsive process perspective, *an organisation is evolving identity*. In talking about organisations, the normal practice is to focus almost exclusively on the collective or ‘we’ identities. The complex responsive process perspective, however, encourages us not to lose sight of the fact that ‘I’ identities are inseparable from ‘we’ identities’ [Stacey (2005): p 435]

According to Stacey strategy and identity are inextricably linked. He says that strategy is ‘the evolving narrative pattern of organisational identity. It is the evolving pattern of what an organisation is.’ [Stacey (2005): p 435] Identity and its development is the focus of this project. My overarching interest is in the dynamics of how identity is formed and played out in organisations and how it is influenced by a newcomer to the organisation, especially one in an authoritative role. In this project I want to explore aspects of complex responsive processes that have established the current identity of the University and try to make sense of some of the patterns that are emerging.

I am interested in the idea of identity formation as a practice of engagement between the people involved. ‘Practicing identity’ as a Head of School is meaningful as it is both something that one does and something that one learns to do better by doing it. If, as Stacey implies, strategy is fundamentally about identity, then the role of the Head of School is important in the role that it plays in influencing the agenda for what the organisation does and the way that it does it. I therefore want to look at what it is that we do in some of our day-to-day interactions and how this plays a role in the emergent identity of the collective.

EP Thompson defined culture as a happening. It isn't just there; it isn't just structure; it doesn't last forever. But neither is it altogether subject to our conscious control or creative choices. It is made, but neither under conditions of our choosing nor by individuals alone. Going back to Stacey: 'The complex responsive process perspective, however, encourages us not to lose sight of the fact the 'I' identities are inseparable from 'we' identities.' [Stacey (2005): p 435]. I want to examine this 'happening' and see how it is influenced through our interactions.

This project builds on events that took place from March 2010 to May 2011 at a particular crossroad for the University. The mechanism for university funding changing, and senior management has also decided to change its focus from undergraduate to postgraduate education. The Vice Chancellor has also announced his retirement, signaling a change of leadership. The increased anxiety and ambiguity in the organisation opens up questions of strategy, confidence and identity. Many authors argue that modernity has resulted in an increased association of identity with the organisations that we work for, changing from clans and village communities – organisations helping us to reflect and confirm who we are. The University has decided to engage brand consultants to help develop a brand proposition to present a distinctive message in the marketplace – one that is credible and relevant to who we are and what we do. The interactions that occur give me the opportunity to look at the local interactions that take place around the topic of corporate identity and the role of senior management.

In this project I want to compare some of the organisational presentations of 'self' into everyday life with some of the theories developed for individuals and ascertain if there are parallels for organisational identity with personal identity.

Who Do We Think We Are?

I was the first to arrive at the Vice Chancellor's office in Main House. I went in to see his Personal Assistant. I had spent the previous day putting together a slide show, pulling in various external pieces of data to make sure my argument would convince the Vice Chancellor's Group (VCG), and in particular the Vice Chancellor, that

employing external brand consultants would be a good way for the University to present its purpose and identity to the external world.

This process had started about two years before, when I had just joined the University. I had been talking to the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic), DVCA about identity and our feeling that B. University did not present a confident or distinctive image to the world that allowed students to make a judgment about what we did, what we stood for and what type of relationship they would have with us. DVCA had been watching ‘Mad Men’ on television and had been seduced by the idea of a good advertising job for the University. His recent research had built on his expertise of Oscar Wilde and he had written about ‘cool’. We agreed that YY University didn’t have a clear identity, let alone one that would be considered cool. We were constantly being mistaken for University of Y, which – although much younger than us – ranked significantly higher in league tables, esteem and research profile. In parallel with these conversations I was asked to make a brief presentation to the Board of Governors as a new senior manager in the University. I was asked to talk about the building work that had taken place in the School of Art & Design and how I saw this affecting student recruitment. I decided to take the opportunity to talk about what type of School we were aspiring to be, how we compared with other schools, not just nationally, but internationally and how this would affect recruitment, income and research opportunities. I used a technique called ‘design totems’ that I had used in my brand consulting work. It is based on the work by Henri Tajfel and John Turner [Tajfel (1981)] on social identity and self-categorisation in which they asked students to associate themselves with famous paintings, and by association, artists that were presented to them. I asked the Board of Governors to choose between examples from Piet Mondrian, Pablo Picasso and Jackson Pollock. The predominant choice was Pablo Picasso, however, the Vice Chancellor and Deputy Vice Chancellor (Finance), both accountants, opted for Mondrian. I was less interested in the actual choice of images, but in the conversations that opened up. The Board of Governors was normally “talked at” in these presentations and members were pleased to have some audience participation at the end of a long day. The conversation soon became about distinctiveness and what this meant for YY University. The Vice Chancellor stated that there were three core themes for the University: teaching quality – as an indicator of our strength; high student applications – as an indication of our popularity; and

financial performance – as an indication of our business prowess. Before I got a chance to comment that these were really not points of distinctiveness, the Vice Chancellor thanked me for my presentation and intimated that it was time for me to leave the meeting so that they could get back to their agenda. The agendas at these senior meetings are extremely well controlled, with time slots accurate to within 5 minutes. I left the meeting feeling that I had possibly upset the Vice Chancellor but had provoked the Board of Governors to have a conversation about identity and in particular visual identity.

Identity

Identity comes from the Latin word ‘identitas’ meaning “sameness”, so it pays to be a bit more descriptive about what I am trying to discuss: sociological identity of an organisation. Pfeffer (1981) indicates that frequent communication by management, through informational social influence, leads to the development of a common set of understandings about the organization and the environment.

‘These understandings, these shared meanings, provide organizational participants with a sense of belonging and identity as well as demarcating the organization from its environment and assisting in the control and commitment of those within the organization’ [Pfeffer (1981): p 13].

Communications from management are particularly important in a context of change since stakeholders’ previous knowledge and understanding of the organization and its environment may no longer apply. However, top management cannot control completely the meanings which stakeholders will attribute to its statement of identity. Symbolic references are subject to interpretations. Weick (1995) argues that people who can find labels that bring order into ambiguous situations are able to direct organisational action.

‘Labels carry their own implications for action, and that is why they are so successful in the management of ambiguity’ [Weick (1995)].

In general, the socially accepted role of senior managers as strategists and macro actors, as well as the ambiguity of the situation, grant particular importance to management’s representation of the organisation’s identity. The role of macro actor in

my personal case has been overtaken by a number of macro and micro events and so there has been a lot of improvisation, with a significant amount of retrofitting narratives to describe what has been happening. The focus of the narrative, or certainly the primary narrative, has changed even in my short time here. This has been due mainly to slightly different objectives in the change. I have consciously tried to have different types of conversations with people: some about behaviour, some about overarching goals, some about the enemy. Brand literature often talks about the importance of creating a tagline which becomes a mantra for the organisation. During the peak of the battles with Coca Cola, Pepsi Co's driver for change was 'Kill Coke'. This became an incredible uniting force within the organisation and became a shared driver for many years. The enemy for the School has predominantly been my predecessor, and while this was useful through the initial few months of my time here, it does not allow me to focus our attention on bigger, and more external, issues.

In Harré's social psychology, the central elements from both ethnomethodology and dramaturgy are incorporated into his theory of social and personal being [Harre & Moghadam (2003)]. What is appealing in this work is the performance element of the individuals involved in the organisation. It also provides an element of the theatre in which the work of organisations takes place. The gestures that one makes in relation to the social interactions become quite significant. Recent visits by, and associations with, well known and respected people to the School have led to a greater self-belief, certainly in some of the surface conversations. Whether this belief manifests itself in performance of this new identity and maintenance of this identity, only time will tell.

‘a sign [that is, a psychological tool] changes nothing in the object of a psychological operation. A sign is a means for psychologically influencing behaviour – either the behaviour of another or one's own behaviour; it is a means of internal activity, directed towards the mastery of humans themselves’ [Vygotsky in Wertsch (1985)]

Vygotsky has a striking parallel with the work of Mead. Both theorists believe that a sign is the social means of influencing the actions of others. In the process the sign also becomes the subjective means of directing one's own actions. However for both theorists, all elements of human activity are objective before they can become

subjective. In terms of the idealized nature of branding and articulation, the moments of truth, or the reality of the promise comes in the action:

‘In the beginning was neither the Word nor the Act; but the Word of Act and the Act of the Word’ [Benedetto Croce (1913)]

Social reality and social activity are created at the point where conversation begins between individuals, for it is through language that society and the self are created. How individuals create, sustain and change their perceptions of self, other people, their organisations and their occupations is the area of interest for me at this stage. Stacey’s view on organisational behaviour is:

‘whereas the dominant discourse takes local interaction, micro and local levels as parts of the whole system, the alternative takes the view that the macro (population-wide or global) is continually emerging in the micro as individuals simultaneously form, and are formed by the social’ [Stacey (2005): p 5]

The micro interactions play themselves out at macro level and so paying attention to my day-to-day behaviour has an impact on the collective identity, and conversely, the collective identity has an impact on me.

The tension between the personal identity and the collective identity can present an ongoing struggle that is possibly greater in academia. I believe there is an inferiority that exists in academia, especially in art schools where artists are seen as having sold out to their profession because they can’t make a living as artists. This usually results in artists taking part time roles to ensure they have space for their own practice, but there still seems to be a hang up about their own status as opposed to those doing it in the ‘real’ world. The change of emphasis in universities towards students being seen as customers and the growing use of social media for evaluation means that there seems to be a greater desire to be liked. This has had quite an impact on certain subjects and the behaviour of tutors. There is also the constant issue of comparing performance with external standards established by external agencies to facilitate universal comparisons. I believe this has led to further neutralization of the collective identity and the drive to a more bland presentation of the collective self.

Social identity, as articulated by Mead, should be viewed as a social process that has

two ‘distinguishable phases’; one he called the ‘I’ and the other the ‘me’.

‘The ‘I’ is the response of the organism to the attitudes of the others; the ‘me’ is the organized set of attitudes of others which one himself assumes. The attitudes of the others constitute the organized ‘me’, and then one reacts towards that as an ‘I’.’ [Mead (1934): p 175].

In Mead’s theory the ‘I’ and the ‘me’ are simultaneously distinguishable and interdependent. They are distinguishable in that the ‘me’ is the self a person is aware of, while the ‘I’ is ‘something that is not given in the ‘me’’ [Mead (1934): p 175]. They are interrelated in that the ‘I’ is ‘the answer which the individual makes to the attitude which others take toward him when he assumes an attitude toward them’ [Mead (1934): p 177]. ‘The ‘I’ both calls out the ‘me’ and responds to it. Taken together they constitute a personality as it appears in social experience’ [Mead (1934): p 178]. One is formed by the social situation as well as forming the social situation. I believe that this has parallels for organisational identity and could provide a way of making sense of how an organisation’s social identity is formed.

Memorability

About a month later, in my regular progress meetings with DVCA, we got back onto the subject of identity and brand strategy. DVCA informed me that there had been a number of discussions at VCG about distinctiveness and that the Vice Chancellor had asked the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Strategy) to come up with a paper on what made us distinctive. DVCA asked me to make sure that my School made comments on it when it was circulated; in parallel he wanted to persuade the VCG to consider developing a brand strategy. In my experience in the University, the Vice Chancellor makes all of the key decisions. He can overrule the VCG, and those that know how to play the game often go straight to him for a decision, which the VCG then ratifies. He operates a very patriarchal model and seems to be loyal to certain people who have his trust and play the game well.

DVCA arranged an audience for me to present to VCG on branding, what this would entail and what this could mean for the University. I used the generic slide show I often use for industry, in particular people cynical about branding, but tailored it to

the higher education sector. I made a point of concentrating on the benchmark universities that we compared ourselves to – the new ones, the Million+ ones – and not those with hundreds of years of history and track record. I made a point of saying that we had a number of things right but that things were not joined up and that all we really needed were some strong narratives that would join up what we already did. This could be developed into a key element of distinctiveness that would feed into the document A. was working on. The room looked on silently. It was only when I mentioned the anecdote from the CEO of Coca Cola that I got a response from the Vice Chancellor. The CEO of Coca Cola once said that if there were a major disaster in the world and all of the Coca Cola warehouses were destroyed, it would take them about six months to recover, but if there were a disaster in which everyone lost their memory, Coca Cola would never recover. At this point, the Vice Chancellor raised a quizzical eyebrow and smiled. I continued the presentation and talked about competing for choice in a crowded marketplace, how we had to help students make a decision, but it was at that stage that I knew the Vice Chancellor was hooked. After the presentation I was asked to leave and apparently the debate continued.

Hierarchy and Status

The next day DVCA informed me that it had gone well – the Vice Chancellor thought it was a good idea, and responded well to the suggestion that he could retire from the University with a clearly articulated strategy and a tidied up marketing and communications strategy. Having the Vice Chancellor in favour of the project was the major hurdle, even though there were objections coming from the other two Deputy Vice Chancellors (Strategy and Finance). DVCA thought this was to do more with the relationship they had with him rather than with the idea. DVCF contacted me shortly afterwards and asked me how much he should budget for this process in the next two financial years. I said I would brief a number of agencies to get a method statement and a quote for the work. I started to talk to a number of agencies, including Saatchi & Saatchi, who I put on the shortlist along with some other agencies, all with international experience and reputations.

I gave this shortlist to DVCA in the form of a brief presentation along with an indication of what the process would involve. I was not given access to the VCG

directly but had to work through DVCA. At one of the following VCG meetings, DVCA, enthusiastically thinking of a Mad Men episode in which we would be in a smoke-filled room talking about creative campaigns, decided to present an update on progress and tabled the paper I had written. He told me afterwards that it had been quite a difficult meeting and that DVCS and DVCF had basically attacked the project saying that we were not in the league to be employing Saatchi & Saatchi. DVCA did point out that we were a £50 million company and we should be thinking of this scale, and the initial cost estimates had come back pretty evenly between all of the agencies. Apparently the conversation had not gone anywhere. The Vice Chancellor had not intervened and had let the squabble continue until the time for that topic was up. DVCA came out quite annoyed and sent me a text to meet urgently. He told me that he had been a bit too eager and perhaps naïve in presenting too early and that we needed to include some local companies in the mix. I was also to get the companies to present examples of work that related to organisations just like us; in the meantime he would go back to the Vice Chancellor directly. At the next Senior Management Team meeting the Vice Chancellor announced that the University would be undertaking a ‘brand refresh’ and that this had been cleared with the Board of Governors. I was taken by surprise and looked across to DVCA who could not contain his smile. DVCF and DVCS both looked blankly ahead.

It took quite a while to get the agencies to put their proposals in a format that I thought was going to feel local enough for VCG. I spent quite a bit of time feeding information to the companies. When the paperwork did come in I was surprised to find that the local company was one of the more expensive ones. I put a quick summary paper together, recommending the one I thought was best suited to us and sent it to DVCA for his comments. He emailed me almost straight away and said that he wanted to table it at the meeting on Friday in three days’ time and could I be available. He sent the document to the Vice Chancellor, who circulated it to the other members of the VCG. I received a text message on the Thursday saying that I should expect a rough ride. DVCA had overheard some comments between DVCS and DVCF. DVCF had emailed me the day before asking if VAT was included in the budget figures, why the brand agencies had all picked up on the negative comments, and why they hadn’t all jumped at the distinctiveness document that DVCS had put together. I’ve never seen DVCS and DVCF as allies. I have a reasonable relationship

with DVCS and we seem to have ideas and interests in common, but lately I have found DVCF a little hostile in my conversations with him over future budgets. With this in mind, I crafted a brief email back that qualified the VAT amounts and also made a statement that the briefing had been done before DVCS's email had been made public and that the companies had only responded to what data was available in the public domain, I also pointed out that this was exactly the reason why we needed to sort out a communications strategy – we may think we are fantastic and value certain facts and figures, but what the public sees could be quite different.

So, I find myself waiting outside the Vice Chancellor's office, arrived early, hopefully with all the paperwork prepared and with answers to DVCF's email from the night before. I am waiting on the landing when DVCA arrives followed by DVCS and DVCF. The mood seems light and trivial. We talk about University Campus Suffolk announcing that they too would be charging maximum tuition fees from next year. There was some banter about 'who are University Campus Suffolk?' and 'how can they be charging maximum fees?' I make a mental note to bring this conversation into the presentation. DVCA looks at me and says that I should wait outside until the Vice Chancellor asks me to come in. They all go in.

About five minutes later, I am summoned into the room. There are many members away, and two allies are not there. I start by revisiting the reasons for the project and the benefits that would come from it. I had pulled out some extracts from a recent Times Higher Education Journal article and from DVCS's paper on distinctiveness. I also talked about University WW, one of our benchmark institutes. I said we were not the same, and that on a number of measures we perform better, but that actually no one knew. I also pointed out that UWW were significantly bigger than us but had recently conducted a brand 'refresh' with the same agency I was proposing. I pulled out an extract from their website and pointed out that if UWW thought they had little brand awareness, it was certainly going to be the case for us. The Vice Chancellor nodded. He had a couple of questions about the local agency. I said that they were one of the more expensive ones and had focused on developing a website for us rather than helping us articulate a meaningful strategy and communication plan. I said that we needed to work on the internal communications as much as the external communications; if we did not engage our staff it would be a short-lived project. The

project also had to complement the work that DVCS was doing with regards to distinctiveness and the new website. DVCA nodded in agreement. DVCF then asked whether we needed to get Board of Governors' approval for my recommendations. The Vice Chancellor said no and asked me to continue. I carried on with the presentation, but I could see the Vice Chancellor was agitated. He stopped me a couple of minutes later and said to DVCF "why do I need Governors' approval? I told you we already have it and so it does not need to be revisited". DVCF sat there quietly. I concluded my presentation, tried to inject some humour, and left the meeting.

About an hour later I received an email from the Vice Chancellor that he approved my recommendations and that DVCA and I should proceed at full speed with the project. DVCA sent me a text almost straight away just saying "Result....".

Performance and Denial of Self

There are a number of issues in this exchange that I would like to explore. The main one that has struck me while working at YY University is the amount of protocol that is in place for such a small institution – only 7,000 students in total. The Vice Chancellor takes his role very seriously and plays out the public performance in accordance with what he thinks the role entails. In a very early conversation he instructed me, after I called him "FF", to call him "Vice Chancellor". In all of the formal meetings he chairs, the interactions are very precisely channeled through the Chair, are efficiently dealt with and kept sober. The Vice Chancellor has been at the University for more than twenty years, starting off in the finance department. He has worked his way up and presided over significant changes as the University has grown from a small teacher training college to the current institute with its own research degree awarding powers. He has done this in a simple, low risk way, managing the finances prudently and putting us in an unusually strong financial position with no borrowings. From time to time, especially in public forums he makes the point that he is not an academic, and so it does make sense that he holds on to the title of Vice Chancellor when talking to an academic audience. It gives him a level of authority and power within that group of people. As Goffman says:

‘When an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them’ [Goffman (1959): p 28].

The Vice Chancellor does not see the importance, or relevance, of bringing his own values and ethics to the role. We have often pointed out to him that he does bring his own personality to bear. He is a good solid Yorkshireman who manages in a paternalistic way. He is a vegan and a big supporter of animal welfare – the University would never conduct experiments on animals. At one stage in the presentation described above he asked me what this “hang up” about values was and could I explain to him the difference between values, aims and objectives were.

The performance of academic life is probably most visible during the graduation ceremony, when tradition, pomp and ceremony are at their peak. At the last graduation I was told that the Vice Chancellor had designed his own gown – a bright blue ceremonial head to toe gown covered in gold braid and gold epaulets – it was truly ostentatious. I am struck by the importance of this role-playing, especially at senior management level, at the University. Scott observes that

‘Nothing conveys the public transcript more as the dominant would like it to seem than the formal ceremonies they organize to celebrate and dramatize their rule.’ (Scott (1990): p 58).

I am also struck by the dynamics within the VCG – the Vice Chancellor and the three Deputy Vice Chancellors have over a hundred years between them at the University; they are all approximately the same age, white, dress the same in dark suits (predominantly pin stripe) and ties and have adopted similar behaviours. I have also noticed that some of my behaviours are changing to adopt some of the language and attitude of the collective.

‘The question how far the men who rise to the top in the Civil Service take on the ‘tone’ or ‘colour’ of a class other than that to which they belong by birth is delicate and difficult.’ [Goffman (1959): p 33].

However, the similarities end here; the hidden transcript is that the Deputy Vice Chancellors don’t really get on with each other and, when not in meetings with the Vice Chancellor, are constantly fighting amongst each other. At one of their meetings

the Vice Chancellor stopped an argument between two of them from escalating, and told them to see him afterwards. This reinforces the patriarchal style of management, but it does suggest that this style of management has been necessary for the team to get along and to make decisions. The Vice Chancellor, as the parent, maintains some form of order and decision-making. All of the members cooperate in the presentation and continuation of this hierarchy and way of working.

‘The front becomes a ‘collective representation’ and a fact in its own right.’ [Goffman (1959): p 37]. Scott talks about the role of the public and hidden transcript in power relationships stating that the public transcript is often ‘the *self*-portrait of dominant elites as they would see themselves.’ [Scott (1990): p 18]. He goes on to say that a ‘convincing performance may require both the suppression or control of feelings that would spoil the performance and the simulation of emotions that are necessary to the performance.’ [Scott (1990): p 28-29]. He goes on to say that repetition of this makes the performance automatic and effortless. The Vice Chancellor plays this role very well; putting on an act that I think has become second nature to him and is probably reflected into his private life. The public performance and the public transcript are still strong, however the hidden transcript has started to become less hidden. We still want the public transcript, I believe, especially in the current context of changing funding policies that could have a significant impact on the future of institutes like ours. We want to believe that the Vice Chancellor has a strong view on what is going on and what to do about it.

However, since the Vice Chancellor announced his intention to retire, this idealisation has started to show some cracks with some more public challenges to the decision-making process and posturing for when the new person comes into the role. Recent staff redundancies affected the VCG, so the Deputy Vice Chancellors are finding that they have more work, less time and increasingly less inclination to keep up the performance of the hierarchy. Goffman indicates that errors and mistakes are often corrected behind closed doors, before the public performance takes place, but recent events ‘at moments of great crisis’ have started to show a breakdown in these acts [Goffman (1951): p 166]. Goffman talks about three attributes needed to sustain the performance: dramaturgical loyalty; dramaturgical discipline; and dramaturgical circumspection. Maintenance of the public transcript was well controlled, but the

recent changes have started to change things. All three are starting to show cracks with the Deputy Vice Chancellors less inclined to play their roles. However, to avoid a complete breakdown, the main behaviour is still in line with the main act of hierarchy and role playing: the Vice Chancellor makes the ultimate decisions, and will not tolerate questioning of it once the decision has been made; DVCF will ask the money questions; DVCS will develop papers on distinctiveness; and DVCA will define the academic identity of the organisation. The audience contributes by exercising tact – we want to believe the Vice Chancellor is in charge/control, especially in this period of big change – but we are also starting to undermine him, in expectation of a ‘better’ new person we can believe in.

The dynamic in the VCG of playing the role, I believe, also reflects in the overall identity and image of the University. We play the role of being a university – or at least what the VCG thinks is the behaviour of a university – without bringing any of our own personality into it: there is no YY in YY University, in the same way there is no FF in the Vice Chancellor’s role. Or at least that is the intention. There is of course a personality there, at both an organisational level and at the individual level of the Vice Chancellor. The Vice Chancellor has often stated that he leaves his personality at the door when he comes into work, but recently DVCA and I have started to challenge him on this, pointing out some key decisions that he has made that only he could have made and articulated that way. It is early days, but we hope that the brand strategy work will act as a reflective tool to put some light on our personality and the way we do things.

Presenting an Image

Dutton & Dukerich (1991) claim that the opinions and reactions of others affect identity through a process of ‘mirroring’, suggesting that this process motivates organisational members to get involved in issues of identity and image that would show them in a better light. Bearing in mind the ideas of Mead on the development of self through communication, this does not work alone for an individual but has an interaction with the ‘I’ and the ‘me’. The notion of identity is not just about reflection in the mirroring process, it is also about self-examination – there has to be a sense of themselves as part of this dynamic. There is reflexivity in organisational identity

dynamics as the process by which organisational members understand and explain themselves as an organisation. If the organisation's strategy focuses on external factors without due attention to the 'self' there is a danger that the organisation can lose its own identity. In an increasingly networked world, I believe that people choose to work with organisations that they have some affinity with. With the massive choice of academic institutions available to them people will gravitate towards institutes that have a clearly articulated and attractive personality. However, if an organisation focuses too much on its own identity without regard to the external there is a danger of becoming self absorbed, hubristic, and more and more detached. Albert & Whetten (1985) proposed that disassociation between the internal and the external definitions of the organisation may have severe implications for survival:

‘The greater the discrepancy between the ways an organisation views itself and the way outsiders view it...., the more the ‘health’ of the organisation will be impaired (ie lowered effectiveness)’ [Albert & Whetten (1985): p 269]

When considering this dynamic in the individual there are often concerns in a psychological sense ranging from slight social dysfunctionality to psychotic behaviour – could the same apply to an organisation when culture and images become disassociated? Brown [Brown (1997); Brown & Starkey (2000)] discussed the issue of an organisation being unwilling or unable to respond to external images as organisational narcissism. Based on Freud, Brown claimed that narcissism is a psychological response to the need to manage self-esteem. Although Freud presented it as an individual concept, Brown justifies its extension to an organisation:

‘...organisations and their subgroups are social categories and, in psychological terms, exist in the participants’ common awareness of their membership. In an important sense, therefore, organisations exist in the minds of their members, organisational identities are parts of their individual members’ identities, and organisational needs and behaviours are the collective needs and behaviours of their members acting under the influence of their organisational self-images.’ [Brown, (1997): p 650]

In Schwartz's analysis of the Challenger disaster, when taken to extremes, organisational narcissism can have dire consequences [Schwartz (1987): p 199]. At more moderate levels, organisational narcissism can have a disregard for others at one level and a denial of self at another. The balance in our case seems to be closer to the latter. Paying too much attention to external stakeholders gives too much power over organisational self-definition such that cultural heritage is ignored. Ignoring cultural heritage leaves organisation members unable to reflect on their identity in relation to their assumptions and values. It can render the organisation a vacuum of meaning filled by a random assortment of stock images presented by central marketing aimed only at external stakeholders.

Alvesson (1990) argues that image replaces culture in the minds of managers, which leads to the loss of culture. VCG focuses on presenting an image of a stereotypical university with little acknowledgement of the organisation's cultural heritage and values. The danger is that we have become obsessed with producing generic images and projections of a typical university in the hope of impressing our immediate customers: undergraduate students in local markets.

‘An image is something we get primarily through coincidental, infrequent, superficial and/or mediated information through mass media, public appearances, from second-hand sources etc., not through our own direct, lasting experiences and perceptions of the ‘core’ of the object.’ [Alvesson (1990): p 377]

Taken to an extreme, we will become a representation of a typical university or as Baudrillard put it ‘its own pure simulacrum’:

‘Such is simulation, insofar as it is opposed to representation. Representation stems from the principle of equivalence of the sign and of the real (even if this equivalence is utopian, it is fundamentally axiom). Simulation, on the contrary, stems from the utopia of the principle of equivalence, *from the radical negation of the sign as value*, from the sign as reversion and death sentence of every reference. Whereas, representation attempts to absorb simulation by interpreting it as a false representation, simulation envelops the

whole edifice of representation itself as simulacrum.’ [Baudrillard (1994): p 5-6]

The twenty-first century’s obsession with celebrity develops this mixture of image and identity that promotes a fantasy setting. There is the danger that an idealised version of reality, or as Baudrillard terms it a hyper-reality is established. This could further disassociate culture from identity.

I, Me, We, Us and Them

For Norbert Elias, individual and collective identity/habitus are inextricably linked and it is therefore impossible to analyse the collective ‘we’ identity without consideration of the ‘I’ identities and the social contexts in which individuals find themselves. Elias’ process sociology attempts to overcome dichotomous models of structure/agency, individual/society and objectivism/subjectivism. In so doing it avoids the reification tendencies of branding models which provide an over-simplified and overly deterministic account of the social life of an organisation and the excessively individual accounts that fail to address the whole. Elias also comments on the spatial models of hierarchy that talk about senior management being ‘up there’ and of ‘downtrodden bottoms’ and pulled ‘middles’. Elias focuses on the interactions that take place between people and on hegemony. There is also the question of the idealised identity that is presented by the organisation, especially with current trends of sustainability and environmental matters. Whereas this can be problematic in terms of a manifestation of identity and behaviour, is there actually anything wrong in presenting an aspirational aim?

‘Individuals can make greater claims about their own self, and about the situation, at the beginning of an interaction than they can once the interaction is underway: at this point, they find themselves and others bound by the moral claims and demands they have made through their initial definitions.’ [Burkitt (2000): p 58]

In Ian Burkitt’s ‘Social Selves’ he argues that the Western tradition of thought is based around a view that the human being is a self-contained unit with ‘their

uniqueness deep inside themselves, like pearls hidden in their shells' [Burkitt (2000): p 1]. He goes on to say that 'this understanding of people as monads creates one of the central problems that has become known as the division between society and the individual' [Burkitt (2000): p 1].

“One cannot imagine an ‘I’ without a ‘he’ or a ‘she’, a ‘we’, ‘you’ (singular and plural) or ‘they’” [Elias (1978a): p 123]

Why am I so concerned about the identity of the School, of the University? In one of the learning group critiques, Sam pokes and says “isn’t this about your identity?” What is driving me to get things changed, articulated ‘better’? After all, the School and the University have been doing pretty well with the identities they have been presenting to the outside world. There are inevitably conversations about my own recognition of status both of me and, by association, of the School and the University. I am struck by what Giddens (1991) wrote about individuals being involved in a ‘project of self’ or a ‘reflexive biography’, which allows them to engage in a dynamic and constantly evolving process of defining and re-defining their self-identity. One of the drivers for me is of course my own issues of self-identity: wanting to be associated with a place of work that presents itself well, that provides status for the School – and for me.

With a weak university brand, ‘loyalty’ or cultural associations tend to be back with the departments or the subject areas. If we were Cambridge University I am sure I would be saying ‘School of Art and Design at Cambridge University’ rather than ‘YY School of Art & Design’, not even mentioning YY University. There is definitely the question of status and association. So my own identity and drivers are very much in the mix of this process of identification. It also seems to resonate several staff in the School of Art & Design who feel that YY University doesn’t match up with our own performance as a School and that we are the jewel in the crown. But even then, there is a contradiction in the way that we perceive ourselves against other art schools. To the University we articulate a confident stance that says we compete at the highest level, but then our behaviours and gestures undermine us. When interviewing prospective students I have heard a number of staff members, particularly in fine art, stating that “of course, we aren’t the Slade” or that “we’re just as good as a London

institute”, all of which, I feel, undermines our own aspirations of who and where we are in the pecking order. In another example of where we see ourselves, another head of school said they were surprised that a new staff member with Cambridge, Oxford and Harvard degrees wanted to work at YY University.

The current debate around the tuition fee and where we see ourselves positioned is a clear indicator of status and esteem. For me, the idea of being at a university that is at the £6,000 end of the spectrum, not the £9,000 end, feels uncomfortable (we have since declared fees at £9,000). I feel that we are a better School than that and, I suppose consequently, that I deserve better than that. One of the ‘hang-ups’ I have had with my peers from university days is that design education has been traditionally vocational and therefore predominantly in technical institutes or polytechnics. This means that the universities available to me are the converted polytechnics and not the Russell Group of universities. This drive for status and the ambition for greater things seems to describe my last three jobs, and I believe that it is this drive that tipped this post in my favour – along with a commercial mindset that would fit in with the business aspect of the University.

Elias was critical of the tendency towards reification in interpreting sociological settings. He argued that this was a ‘naively egocentric’ view of social life [Elias (1970): p 14] that gave the false impression that individuals are separated from society. He was equally critical of what he saw as excessive individualism and the tendency to present society as the intentional outcome of individual action and individual agency. Elias developed the idea of unplanned social processes or unplanned order to explain how individuals exercise agency within the constraints of their material circumstances, arguing that there is little relationship between our planned and intentional actions and the consequences of them. We do exercise agency but not in circumstances of our own making and due to the relational nature of social life and human interdependencies, a choice exercised by one individual ‘becomes interwoven with those of others; it unleashes further chains of actions, the direction and provisional outcome of which depend not on him [sic] but on the distribution of power and the structure of tensions within the whole mobile human network’ [Elias (1991): p 49-50]. Elias’ notion of unplanned order not only highlights the fluidity and

indeterminacy of everyday practice, it also suggests that individuals are both free to act in social interactions while also being constrained by their social position.

Mead states that it is through the 'me' that social control is exerted upon the individual. Society controls the conduct of its members in the form of the 'generalised other', who is internalized in individual personalities through the 'me'. This internalization takes place through the ability to adopt someone else's role; moreover, the 'immediate effect of such role taking lies in control which the individual is able to exercise over his own response' [Mead (1934)]. Far from endorsing a fatalistic and deterministic conception of institutions as socially organized means of control over individual creativity, Mead argues that they need only to define people's lines of conduct in a very broad and general sense, and they should afford wide scope for originality and self expression. Mead's notion of social control does not apply judgmental data but does seem to take a very positive view of society. In my case, I have tried to take a particularly positive view of the change that I am trying to bring to the organisation. In gesturing and responding, we take the attitude of the generalised other and in taking this attitude of others we are then constrained and enabled by the collective habitus. At the senior level, I find myself gesturing and responding in quite a hierarchical way, in subconscious recognition of the generalized other in that social context – ie the paternalistic way of working in the VCG. At School level I find myself gesturing and responding more informally. I realize that I have greater authority in this latter context and so my gestures evoke different reactions.

One of the ways I have done this is to work directly with some key staff members who are seen as the trend-setters – one is resident designer with Wallpaper* magazine, one was resident designer with Valentino, one has an extensive international profile. Indirectly I am working on the principle of cultural hegemony, trying to exert social influence through the dominance of one social group over another. By trying to show that things are possible I am trying to demonstrate that the new 'regime' allows people to take the initiative, to do things that have a greater impact on our society. My issue with Gramsci's work on cultural hegemony, unlike the positive outlook of Mead, is that it seems to take a more cynical view of things. The theory claims that the ideas of the ruling class come to be seen as the norm and get adopted as universal ideologies with the thinking that they are for all, but the

reality is that they are really only benefiting the “ruling” class. This may be the case, for example, research is now open to all applicants, but there are only really the usual suspects taking part in it.

If an institution is seen as a social process that depends on people’s internalisation of a set of organized attitudes, then in my own practice, I need to be aware of my role as an individual in my relation to the attitudes of the collective. By presenting an idealized view of what we could be, and what this would mean, I may influence by creating new experiences for people through the gestures that I make. In the concept of habitus Elias most clearly articulates the interdependent relationship between the individual, the collective and social structures. To attend to practice is to attend to the ways in which human action is embedded in social organisation. Its effectiveness is made possible, as Bourdieu shows, partly by internalization of social relationships through experience. There are two distinct ways in which Elias’ conception of habitus might be understood as embodied. Firstly, habitus is something experienced intrapsychically, as a psychic structure or personality type and, secondly, habitus has a material reality in so far as it is produced and reproduced through our practices and interactions with others.

Another important feature of the habitus is the distinction Elias makes between the individual, subjective habitus embodied in individuals and the social, collective habitus based on shared experiences and social position. Individual habitus will be unique to them and the subjective habitus needs to be considered as both individually experienced and individually authored. Social habitus refers to the shared habits, dispositions and practices of groups. For Elias, social habitus can be understood as ‘the soil from which grow the personal characteristics through which an individual differs from other members of his society’ [Elias (1991): p 182]. In this sense, Elias uses the notion of social habitus to present a view of social life that allows for agency and choice but within circumstances not of individuals’ making. Individual habitus, the habits, dispositions and practices “specific to a particular person” can only ever be understood as an aspect of the wider social habitus. So, although individual habitus has uniqueness to it, it is always grounded in the collective or shared habitus. Since Elias adopted a processual view of social life (and, therefore, habitus, individually experienced and collectively authored), it should be seen as a life long process, which

begins at birth. Elias argued that it was not possible to understand individual or social habitus without reference to their formation and reformation over time. Our 'whole outlook on life continues to be psychologically tied to yesterday's social reality, although today's and tomorrow's reality already differs greatly from yesterday's' [Elias (1986) cited in van Krieken (1998)]. As a newcomer into the collective habitus, by implication I have had an impact on it and it has had an impact on me. From my recent yesterdays I bring an understanding and outlook that is quite different from the general outlook of the collective, but there are elements of overlap, otherwise we would have headed, I assume, straight into major conflict. There are therefore elements of sameness that bring us together for some common purpose and way of working, but there are also elements of difference that can and are causing tension. The apathy associated with trying to be 'good' in a broader sense and on a more global stage has caused frustration. As Burkitt says:

'Because of the background expectancies we can anticipate that what we say and do will be recognized and understood by others. But more than this, we can presume that it *ought* to be understood by any rational and reasonable person and, therefore, these expectancies are regarded as morally binding'
[Burkitt (2000): p 57]

Unsuccessful projects aimed at making us 'better' have meant I have had to change tack, but does it also mean that I have to change aspirations? If there is a major disconnect between my aspirations and that of the collective are we heading for a difficult relationship? Certainly most conversations I have had indicate there are many people who want to be associated with an organisation with recognized status. Many have been educated at the Slade and the Royal College of Art, and so I assume have experienced what it is like to belong to an organisation of international standing.

Making Meaning

Numerous authors have emphasised the role of leaders in creating meaning for organisations [Barnard (1938); Selznik (1957); Lyles & Schwenk (1992); Smircich & Morgan (1982)]. Top management can influence the cognitive representations people have of the organisation through its interpretation of environmental events and

organisational capabilities and through its translation of cues into meaning [Daft & Weick (1984)]. The role of top managers in the construction of identity is particularly significant during times of change and in the context of high ambiguity. People who experience ambiguity often look for clues in the environment that may help them interpret the situation [Weick (1995)]. As Watzlawick points out ‘confusion triggers off an immediate search for meaning or order to reduce the anxiety inherent in any uncertain situation’ [Watzlawick (1976)]. Individuals and groups affected by the change attempt to reduce the experienced ambiguity and become highly attentive to communications from management. Pfeffer (1981) indicates that frequent communication by management through informational social influence leads to the development of a common set of understandings about the organisation and the environment. However, management cannot control the meanings made by the individuals and the groups.

As the narrative shows, YY University is a very formal and hierarchical organisation. My personal style is far less formal. When I chair School Management Meetings, I tend to make them a lot more discursive and chatty, trying to ensure that everyone has a chance to participate, and therefore feels a part of it rather than a silent observer. However, two years into the post, a number of things that we said that we wanted to do have not happened – especially ones that are external facing such as the website or our own journal publication. For some reason, we as a team seem to be reluctant to make decisions about our identity. At a meeting about the upcoming degree show I was frustrated to hear that we had not developed the poster, the invitation, the advertising, or the School website. The shared approach to decision-making does not seem to be working. The three Heads of Department, while all similar in background, present a united face but cannot agree on look or feel for the posters or the invitations. This strikes me as worrying as the poster is only a tiny element of the public conversation about our identity, but I am starting to realise that, for all our bravado, we are not really all that confident.

I am conscious of my behaviour in the various forums that I have to perform in. We all play along with the public transcript in the Senior Management Team, acknowledging that, for the time being, it is the Vice Chancellor who makes the decisions. We may have some influence on him, but the place to have these

conversations is in the one-to-one meetings and not in public forums. Playing that role at my own School Management Team level, I am now becoming aware of the dynamics of the group and the repeating patterns of behaviour that are emerging. The open style of management and co-creation is working too slowly and I have decided to take a more directive role in the decision-making. I intend to do this through, in the short term, a project on our image, appointing an external consultant to present back a more aspirational impression of who we are and could be, and longer term, conversations about identity and culture. With the former I am conscious that there will also be an exposure of my own biases and I am keen to point out to staff that the images presented are part of a changing discourse and that it will change and be dynamic. With identity and cultural issues there are some direct things that I can influence – for example portfolio, what degrees and types of degrees we choose (or I allow) to proceed – and a number of issues outside any control. I can however, establish the platforms for these conversations.

Having said that, I am also aware that the dominant model of management in the ‘them’ is of patriarchal control and permission seeking. Some organisational members are looking for me to make some gestures towards authority and also make some decisions between the various staff within the School. I am also aware that when it comes to issues of image, I tend to consult with a small number of people, an insider group that holds significant sway over how we present ourselves. This manifestation of cultural hegemony [Gramsci as cited in Scott (1999)] implies that what this very small group of people present is the universal impression of everyone, but in reality it is not. When I have ‘allowed’ some individuals to express their own sense of image, for example the development of a gallery identity and website for the School, I (and others) have been horrified at the images that have been produced. For the time being we are letting the website continue as a marker in the debate on presentation of our image, but it is buried deep within the main website and, no doubt, will be changed over a separate planned summer makeover.

The University branding project has some concerns for me. From my experience the work of brand consultants and the predominant branding literature is about image preservation as opposed to the inward cognitive process of identity creation and maintenance. The role of brand consultants has been to work with staff and with

target audiences, gathering data that then allows them to make a creative leap towards an ‘identity’ for the organisation that they work up into taglines and a visual language. They then produce a Brand Guideline handbook to control the application of this identity as a fixed point of optimal distinctiveness. From my very first days as a consultant I have opposed this and have tried to encourage organisations to have a more fluid and dynamic approach to branding. This has often not worked as it does bring in a fundamentally different way of working and looking at brand. Rather than this negotiation of identity as a static entity, I am interested in the practising of identity and how it emerges from the local interactions and with the global interactions. Images can be chosen and changed in what Giddens called a ‘reflexive project of the self’ [Giddens (1991)] – with the central feature concerning the notion of choice narratives whereby we can create and recreate our ‘identities’.

How are we similar to others? How are we different from them?

Symbolic Construction of Identity

Bourdieu’s concept of habitus is central to his intervention into the debate about structure and agency. If

‘it is necessary to abandon all theories which explicitly or implicitly treat practice as a mechanical reaction” shaped by rules or structures alone, equally “rejection of mechanistic theories in no way implies that [. . .] we should reduce the objective intentions and constituted significations of actions and works to the conscious and deliberate intentions of their authors’ [Bourdieu (1992): p 68].

Mechanism and finalism, structure and agency, are each as reductionist as the other, seeking causes always elsewhere, in some other dimension, either the ‘transcendent, permanent existence’ of objective social constraints and regulations or the ‘transcendence of the ego’ equipped to make its own rules [Bourdieu (1992): p 27]. For Bourdieu habitus is an embodied set of dispositions immanent in practice itself. Habitus is a system ‘of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations’ [Bourdieu (1992): p 53]. These

dispositions are ‘objectively ‘regulated’ and ‘regular’ without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends’ [Bourdieu (1997): p 72]. Habit, our everyday activity, is therefore the product of a ‘*scheme* (or principle) immanent in practice, which [. . .] exists in a practical state in agents’ practice and not in their consciousness, or rather, their discourse’ [Bourdieu (1997): p 27; emphasis in original]. Regulation and practice are immanent to each other, rather than mediated either by consciousness or by external structures. So, when the Vice Chancellor says that he does not bring his personal values to work, according to Bourdieu this is just not possible. But, there is a tempering between personal individual values and the shared organisational values that interact with each other – the two are not independent. Mead argues that we should look at communication as a process of gestures and responses in an ongoing responsive temporal process of conversation. Through our gestures we evoke responses from others, these are formed through our own personal histories and dispositions – habitus. It is through the gestures and responses that we can choose to make a change in the interactions of others.

According to Bourdieu, reflexivity occurs only when a subject’s habitus does not fit a field’s position, however, reflexivity is also enhanced by intra-habitus tensions, by more general incongruences between dispositions, positions, as well as situations unrelated to them. For Bourdieu the habitus as a set of dispositions is the major link between social structures and practices. Social structures, via various socialisation processes, are internalised and become dispositions, and dispositions lead to practices, which in turn reproduce social structures. It is in this way, according to Bourdieu, that the habitus transcends the objectivist-subjectivist divide: it is both structured and structuring, an objective product of social structures as well as the producer of practices reproducing social structures [Bourdieu (1992) (1997)]. ‘The habitus, like every ‘art of inventing’ is what makes it possible to produce an infinite number of practices that are relatively unpredictable, even if they are limited in their diversity.’ [Bourdieu (1992): p 55].

There are many overlaps between this concept of habitus and Deleuze’s concept of the ‘virtual’. Both are immanent and productive, intensive and affective, corporeal and immediate. We can only make sense of any given activity, says Deleuze, in terms

of what it creates and its mode of creation. Deleuze's work proceeds in keeping with Nietzsche's prescription of a 'constant self-overcoming' – "to become what one is, one must not have the faintest notion *what* one is" [Nietzsche (2004)]. However, to understand what role reflexivity assumes in a given field, one has to consider not only the dispositional and positional but also the interactive dimension of the social games. For example, in a football game, the player has to pay attention not only to the game's rules that apply to their position and the position of other players, but also to the actual interactive relations between players as these unfold – a specific habitus carrier has to take into account both the game's institutional structure (ie the relations between roles) and figural structures (ie the relationships between actual players). These are not the same and therefore there are three, rather than two structures: Habitus in what Bourdieu calls a practical logic; Institutional structures, ie the system of positions; Figural structures, ie the systems of patterned relationships between real actors operating on the basis of an interactive and strategising logic.

If this is accepted, then Bourdieu's view that reflexivity occurs only when there is a lack of fit between dispositions and positions, but also: when there are incongruences between dispositional, positional and figural structures; when there are intra-habitus contradictions; and when persons are reflexive irrespective of any of these, or unrelated contradictions. This latter part also allows for a voluntary aspect within the change. Dispositional analyses of "identity" have tried to bridge the gap between "action" and "structure", "subjective" and "objective" by pointing to the subjectivity that derives from social location and its associated habitus indicating the limits of reflexivity and the grounding of the symbolic construction of identity in tacit social practice. The traditional view is based on shared narratives resulting in shared understandings and shared identity. The habitus for Bourdieu is a 'socialised subjectivity' [Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992): p 126] and 'suggests a layer of embodied experience that is not immediately amenable to self-fashioning' [McNay (1999): p 102]. Giddens views people as active agents, reflexively shaping their destinies, while social relations are seen as fluid and discursive with the formation of identities regulated by ideas and meanings, rather than by material structures, 'we are not what we are but what we make ourselves' [Giddens (1991): p 75].

The Presentation of Organisations in Everyday Life

This focus on personality is one that has been of interest for me for a number of years, primarily as a brand strategy consultant working with professional service firms and more recently in a senior management role when trying to develop a particular voice in a cluttered marketplace. Anecdotal research has shown that professional service firms such as lawyers and accountants cannot really market their differences through terms such as ‘we are good at law’ or ‘we are good at accounting’, as that is usually a given. They do, however, try to differentiate themselves through personality and who they are – their unique combinations of people, history and culture. The world we live in is much more transparent and exposed than ever before. This has resulted in far more interrogation of what we say and do and consequently of how we present ourselves to society. This increased exposure to critical voices [Albert & Whetten (1985); Christensen (2001)] also applies to the world of education. The government, media and the customer – in particular the parents of customers – are taking a greater interest in the private life of the organisation, what they claim to do, what they actually do and in exposing any divergence between the impressions made and the organisational actions. The exposure is led by a number of business analysis tools that aim to supplement economic data with evaluations of internal business practices, and in the context of education, the performance and perception of the student ‘customers’. As competition grows, the importance of these measures and the narratives associated with them become more and more important. This increased organisational exposure seems to be driving a need for a more ‘human’ organisation, one that tries to build relationships, and do good things for its communities. With the increase in customer relationships, and in particular the increase in the use of social media, organisations are increasing efforts to get closer to external stakeholders with the aim of building special, personal relationships that expand the boundaries of internal identity thereby changing organisational self-definitions. We are increasingly including alumni to help develop and ‘confirm’ our identity – an external stakeholder group, not in the employment of the organisation. We are effectively encouraging these external stakeholder groups to think of themselves as members of the organisation. This will only increase the exposure the ‘outside’ world has to the ‘inner’ private workings of the organisation. A major implication is that the internal culture, once hidden from view, is now more open to scrutiny. The relationship with

espoused identity therefore has to become far more credible and plausible. The development of organisational identity, closely linked to culture, becomes even more complex as organisational employees hear more opinions and judgments about their organisation from all around.

Organisational identity needs to be theorised in relation to both culture and image in order to make sense of how internal and external factors interact. Many organisational researchers make reference to Mead's theory of social identity and there is an opportunity to take this further to explore how the relationship between the 'I' and the 'me' might be extended to identity processes at the organisational level. What are the analogues for Mead's 'I' and 'me'? In addition, the work of Goffman and Burkitt also lend themselves as a starting point for inquiry into the presentation of 'self'.

Branding in universities has become an increasingly topical issue with some institutions committing substantial financial resources to branding activities. It entails defining the essence of what a university "is", what it "stands for" and what it is going to be known for, requiring precision and consistency in the formulations as well as internal commitment to the brand. The rationale for this has been based on universities feeling that they have to behave "more" like a commercial organisation and therefore have to compete in a free market model. As the cost of education becomes more expensive the perceived value of the degree takes on greater importance. The perception of value is based on a number of things: reputation, brand, peer recognition, networks, profile. A university's brand is a reflection of the intangible value that people associate with the university; it is related to reputation but is not the same – but it is an indicator of the perception. The brand may have intangible associations, but it also has a direct impact on the tangible value of the university, and its ability to attract better staff, students or funding. Brand identity and image also has an impact on behaviour and culture. Within social identity theory [Tajfel (1981)], a large influence on people's behaviour is attributed to the value in having an identity and having sense of being in a group that is distinct from other groups. The theory suggests that distinguishing between in-groups and out-groups allows people to discover the value of their own group, which allows members to gain positive value from membership of *their* group. The brand image is an indication of certain promises and positions the group holds – either explicitly or implicitly.

There are a number of ethical considerations to be made: racism, classism, social mobility. There are also issues of cult behaviours that can result from collective brand identities that dominate the personal identities of some individuals. Identity is formed for universities as soon as a group of people get together, with Vice Chancellors and Senior Management seen as having a role as the brand guardians or stewards. What that seems to mean is that they present an initial directive of what the identity, or strategy, for the organisation is. They are then the upholders, behaving and making decisions according to that identity. Does this really happen? Universities often have a range of disciplines with different sub-identities, often in opposition, so how is this balanced or incorporated.

Conclusions

Identity has many meanings when applied to organisations: for some it is the visual representation of the organisation; for others it is more about the culture; and for some it is more fundamentally about purpose and what the organisation exists to do. The separation of these concepts is problematic in terms of trying to understand how organisational identity is formed and how it changes or can be changed. If, as Stacey argues, strategy and identity of organisations are inextricably linked and that strategy is fundamentally about what we do, then the broader concept of identity is essentially linked to our practice together. When the elements that form identity are separated with uneven attention paid to one rather than another, then at extremes this can result in a lack of balance of the whole and an inordinate focus on one aspect, for example visual identity without consideration of the purpose of the organisation, or on purpose of the organisation without attention to external factors and relationships. By using the notion of habitus, Bourdieu attempts to overcome these series of oppositions that occur: subjectivism vs objectivism, micro vs macro and so on. For Bourdieu, habitus is related to the social conditions of its production that is unconsciously acquired, that is durable and embodied, and that transcends different social circumstances to produce characteristic dispositions to act.

Social identity, as articulated by Mead, should be viewed as a social process that has two “distinguishable phases”; one he called the “I” and the other the “me”. One is

formed by the social situation as well as forming the social situation. I believe that there are parallels in organisational communities and that this provides another way of looking at identity in organisations. A focus on the social links to Bourdieu's theory of habitus which allows us to see people's attachment to organisations as learned and habituated, being open to modification and reconstruction through reflexive agency and through communication practices. Giddens affirms that a fundamental element of human agency is reflexivity; we are capable of monitoring and adjusting our actions and so through creativity and reflexivity we can produce changes in established structures [Giddens (1991)]. Such a change could imply a transformation in identity. Instead of individual, autonomous agents, Mead, Bourdieu and Elias bring to our attention a process viewpoint in which our interactions occur in the social through a pattern of communication of gesture and response in an ongoing temporal process of conversation. When looked at from this viewpoint of complex responsive processes, the individual does not operate as an autonomous individual with complete freedom to act, but as a social entity bound by the pattern of social interactions that have formed and been formed by previous interactions – ie the social habitus.

If we are bound by the social habitus then where does the concept of freedom come in and the ability to make change? Bourdieu's treatment of habitus implies that the process is not deterministic, that through this ongoing process of gesture evoking response, we can influence each other in the process, but can never be certain of the path of the conversation. Each actor in the interaction and their relationship to the contexts will be different and as a result the ongoing conversations are partially indeterminate. As small differences arise in our habitual responses these can escalate into changes in the patterning of our interactions, which emerge as a change in habitus.

If viewed as a community of practitioners we come together for a variety of purposes in organisational life. Experience gained in one community of practice can be modified by other communities of practice: 'we engage in different practices in each of the communities of practice to which we belong. We often behave rather differently in each of them, construct different aspects of ourselves, and gain different perspectives' [Wenger (1999): p 159]. We are all therefore knowledgeable actors in these communities of practice. We have influence as players in the game through our

participation in the game, through interaction and through making gestures that we have influence. We do have some freedom of choice, but constrained by habitus, but through the interaction we also play a part in forming the social habitus as well as being formed by it. Identity emerges from the evolving narrative patterns that play out at both a micro and macro level in the organisation, in what we do and what we say we do.

Identity as imposed or articulated by senior management is only part of the narrative patterns in everyday life, and adds to the interaction of gesture – response. The static approach to identity formation in which an identity is imposed by senior management through propaganda does not take into account the complex responses that occur to those gestures. Social collective identity emerges from this process of interaction. Organisational identity is neither wholly culture nor is it wholly imagistic; it is constituted by a dynamic set of processes that interrelate the two. The narratives that take place are verbal, gestural as well as imagistic. The dominant discourse in brand strategy is to articulate a narrative as a series of value statements about what the organisation stands for and to represent them as a series of ‘look and feel’ visuals. The idea is that we will all end up with a common platform. This imposition of identity is a gesture into the communication process. Not all agents have the same degree of autonomy. ‘Nothing is simultaneously freer and more constrained than the action of the good player’ [Bourdieu (1990a): p 63]. The degree of freedom depends very much on the social position of the individual and the degree of officialisation, institutionalization and ritualization of the context. Powerful people can impose gestures that evoke different responses, but it is still through this gesture-response process that we develop a collective sense. The process of identity formation is a dynamic one that has aspects of voluntary and involuntary action. ‘Habitus is not a destiny’ [Bourdieu (1997): p 180]. The fundamental question is to establish how an individual or an organisation can voluntarily affect their habitus. Habitus changes through reflexivity and we can consciously engage in new gestures, but the direction of change cannot be determined. For that change to occur, Bourdieu believes that ‘if the decision to believe...is to be carried out successfully, it must also obliterate itself from the memory of the believer’ [Bourdieu (1980): p 49]. It must be internalized.

Organisational identity emerges from the interactions in communities of practice.

How those conscious choices then interact within the collective habitus is, however, indeterminate. This requires us to pay more attention to our own practice in the various communities in which we operate, paying attention to the pattern of gestures we make and the responses they evoke. We play a part in this process of identity formation and are also formed by it. We have some freedom to choose but it is limited in part by the manner that we take the attitude of the generalized other, through the collective habitus. We become players in the game, bound by the social rules that are either overt or assumed, but it is through our own responses and gestures that we then interact with the overt and assumed rules, which we form while 'they' also form us.

Project Three: Institutionalising Identity

We live in a world of individuals, groups, institutions, organisations, and collectives, but when moving from the individual to many we struggle to make sense of the whole. Margaret Thatcher famously declared that there is *no* such thing as ‘society’ other than ‘you and me and our next-door-neighbour and everyone we know in our town’ [Raban (1989): p 29]. Durkheim, on the other hand, adopted an organic analogy in order to understand and communicate that collectives are more than the sum of their embodied parts. He talked about collectivity, ‘society’, as a corporeal entity, a ‘living thing’ with firm boundaries, complex functional internal relationships, and higher and lower systems. Individuals are at least embodied and obvious, although their existential status is not straightforward, but collectives are far less obvious and far more nebulous. They may be difficult to ‘see’, but even if there is a tangible presence, (for example, the staff within the School), there must be something else if an aggregation of individuals is to be more than arithmetical [Jenkins (2002a): p 63-84]. The fact that I have a staff of breathing human bodies in a number of buildings is not enough to constitute a collectivity. In the previous project I spent some time looking at practices and in the first instance, an understanding of collective identification could be found in the practices of the embodied individuals that generate or constitute them. There are many social groupings within the School, from practice area to practice area, from age group to age group and also from arbitrary connections external to the School, such as church or the fact that people play together in a band. These social boundaries are fluid and also change when interactions between groups are encountered – when overseas we identify with people from the UK; when in the UK we identify with people from B.; when in B. we identify with people from B. University; when in the University we identify with the School and so on. In this process of identification the relevant criteria of membership are rehearsed, presented and developed – as are the consequences of membership. These are political processes of negotiation, transaction, mobilisation, imposition and resistance, enabling and constraining our current practice.

During these interactions, an image of similarity is symbolically constructed, one which becomes an element of defining the collective identity. But even in that, unless

taken to extreme, collective identity emphasizes similarity - but not at the expense of difference. Similarity and difference are inextricably linked, and depend on the point of view. Difference is also socially constructed, and like similarity, both are, as Bourdieu said, 'culturally arbitrary' and also 'real'.

In this project I want to explore issues of institutionalizing identity, organisation identity and specifically my role in it. Three key themes have emerged for me that I want to bring attention to:

1. Issues of engagement, communication, dialogue and conversation, power and control. For this I will be taking up the ideas of Durkheim, Bohm and Foucault.
2. Issues of intentionality, including tools and techniques around language such as repetition, constraints and mantra. For this I will be taking up ideas from the American Pragmatists and Husserl.
3. The third theme is around notions of recognition, status and charisma. For this I will be taking up Weber and Johnson.

The narrative for study took place during May 2011 and revolves around conversations that took place within the School of Art & Design. Whereas Project 2 looked at the University and my role as a member of the senior management team, this project looks at my role as the Head of School and the different power dynamics that this entails.

What is it that we think we are doing together?

Individual and collective identities engage in complex ways, and because I want to look at institutional collectives, it may be useful to try to describe what I mean by the notion of *institution*:

- An institution is a pattern of behaviour that has become established over time as 'the way things are done'

- An institution has inter-subjective relevance and meaning in the situation concerned – ie people know about it and recognize it as an entity.

Institutions are consequentially enabling and constraining, and (as discussed in the previous project) have aspects of habitualised behaviour that is an emergent property of what people do as well as affecting the habitus of those individuals. The habitualisation of behaviour brings along with it two important practical aspects of enabling and constraining behaviour: choices are narrowed to the point where many courses of action are not available; and since we do not have to think and decide about every aspect of daily life, there are more opportunities for deliberation and innovation – constraints that can lead to creative action. These aspects of constraints are of particular importance in the world of branding, especially when related to the presentation of an image to the marketplace. Habitualisation may be an essential element of institutionalisation, but there must also be a degree of inter-subjectivity – people must have a sense of what it is they are doing together. People must therefore have a sense of habitus and be able to communicate and negotiate with each other in the same terms about what it is they are doing together for there to be a sense of institutionalisation. If it continues over a period of time, the pattern of activity acquires a history. Institutions, therefore involve control. The process of ‘the way things are done’ could lead to the sense of ‘the way things **should** be done’. Doing things differently becomes difficult to imagine unless there is another process of negotiation introduced. This is partly what I am grappling with in my role as the Head of School coming into a very strongly institutionalised way of doing things in an organisation to which people have been part of for twenty to thirty years. At School level there is some articulation of wanting to do things differently, but when engaged and unpicked, behaviour very quickly reverts ‘back’ to the way things were done in the past. After the first year of redundancies, I have found that in some quarters where the line managers have been removed and some restructuring of reporting lines changed that there does appear to be some openness to establishing new ways of working and new systems for ordering, reporting etc. New patterns of working seem to be appearing.

The following narrative concerns a conversation with a senior colleague around trying to instigate change and the negotiations that are taking place in the School.

I had just come back from rather a depressing meeting with the brand consultants. DVCA and I had stuck our necks out and persuaded the Vice Chancellor's Group to proceed with the engagement of external brand consultants to help articulate a distinctive voice for YY University. The consultants I had proposed were the most experienced in the sector and asking around I had received positive feedback. DVCA was looking to me to take the lead on the project and to ensure that the project was successful as there were many senior people who were extremely cynical about the process. In the meeting the brand consultants had presented back their initial findings from the two hundred interviews they had done with both internal and external stakeholders and had assembled their thoughts into one sentence: 'taking care'. Their proposal was that we could build a communication campaign around the concept of 'YY University, we take care'. They had presented some banners and additional tag lines that we could use along the lines of taking care: taking care of business, taking care of you, taking care of the environment etc. Both DVCA and I had had the same response in the meeting: this was extremely dull, did not inspire and did not provide an aspirational theme that either of us felt excited about. After the meeting DVCA sent me a text that just said "Oh Dear".

I took the two consultants to the train station and we spoke more candidly in the car and over a quick coffee. I expressed concerns that the brand was not engaging enough and that we really needed to get some ideas going that would excite people. After a good debate we all did agree that 'taking care' was actually not a bad reflection of where we currently were as a university. We had been cautious over many things; the VC certainly did care and adopt a paternal style. It was probably quite an honest reflection of who we were – but as we discussed, not really of what we should be (according to DVCA and myself!). It did not reflect the potential that we thought existed in the University.

I was sitting at my desk staring into the computer screen wondering how I could steer the consultants when there was a knock at the door. It was Gary, Head of Department for Design and Critical Studies. Gary has been at the School of Art & Design for

about eight years and came with a good track record of research into ceramics. I liked Gary, he knew the quality assurance systems at the University well and held aspirations to help the School become more research active. Under the previous Head of School he had been the Head of Research and, from all accounts had been significantly bullied so that he had become quite passive. I had been working with him over the last year and we had shared many conversations about research, practice and publishing over many coffees. I am not sure how Gary felt about me though. I knew he had applied for my post but had not made the shortlist, so I did feel that there were some challenges in his dealings with me. I quite enjoyed these as they usually made me think and, I hope, work better. Today, Gary had come to talk to me about the research strategy document he was writing. All Schools have to submit a yearly document to the VC for compliance purposes, even if nothing has significantly changed in the year. In the conversations with Gary I had purposefully asked him to take the lead and after having interviewed all of the staff to present a proposal that outlined key areas of research that we could develop as a collective. Gary had been reluctant to do this saying that we already had three research centres. I kept pushing back saying that I had not seen any output from them and that there was no presence or authority to them. There are a number of practitioners in the School who have international profiles but we have never done anything to build an agenda around them.

Gary started off by saying that he had been thinking about what I had asked him to do and that he would like to bring in a friend of his to help him work through some of his ideas. Malcolm had been at University of HH and was now Head of Research at University of PP. I agreed and said that I was happy to cover travel costs and accommodation. Gary went away happy, but I also thought a bit nervously. Had I been too short with him in the interchange? Was I still in a mood from the early presentation? Over the previous weeks Gary had been asking me to be more forceful with staff. He would say things like “In the previous regime, Ron would have forced people into doing research whether they wanted to or not”. At first I would let this pass but recently it had started to annoy me and I remember retorting back that I was not Ron and that there was significantly more research activity in the last two years than there had been before. I think Gary was not keen on the softly-softly approach I had adopted especially after the first year of redundancies. I did agree with him that

we needed to be more directive and that he had my full support in ‘forcing them’ (his words) to perform.

The meeting with Malcolm was set up and we met for a lunch appointment on the following Friday. Malcolm had been a fellow doctoral student with Gary at the Royal College of Art and, now living in Spain, commuted to PP to develop the research agenda there. Gary started by stating that under Ron the staff would have been forced to research. Malcolm stopped him straight away and said “I don’t think that ever works – do you? In my opinion you have to empower people, by all means make them feel some form of responsibility, but I think that we want to be in a place where we are encouraged”. I took a quick look at Gary and noticed that the comment had had an impact, I felt a bit better for me, but then a bit sorry for Gary. Gary quickly changed the conversation to ask about the strategy at PP and their way of working. The conversation picked up well after that and with some stroking from both Malcolm and myself; Gary seemed to feel a bit better. We said that he had already done a lot of the hard work in interviewing everyone and that he should have confidence in putting together a proposal for the School.

Gary and I met again the following week. Gary came into my office and sat down. He said that he had been trying to put the strategy together but he couldn’t because I hadn’t articulated a clear vision for the School and so he was finding it difficult to put something down. I said that I thought I had been talking a lot about what it is that we were trying to do, what was acceptable and what was not acceptable behaviour. He persisted saying that we needed something crisp that ‘they’ could get hold of and work around. This went on for quite a while. After about half an hour my next appointment arrived and so we had to stop. That evening I started to reflect on what had happened that day and I started to get a bit annoyed, both at Gary and at myself. In my first year at the School I had asked Gary to put together plans for a publishing arm for the School and to start putting together plans for a symposium and a magazine that would allow us to connect with other people from around the globe. The publishing part had started in that we had bought a digital press, but the two other plans had gone nowhere. I had initially put this down to workload but I started to realize that Gary needed to be steered, I had given him too much scope and perhaps I needed to get involved a lot more. I wrote a quick email saying that I thought the

vision of the School was ‘towards a proper Art School’ and what that would mean to us in the 21st century. I expanded a bit by saying that art schools in the 19th century were very much about the artist suffering in the garret, then they became about art in industry. The 1960s had seen a resurgence of art schools, especially in the UK, and became a place for campaigning and rebelling. Art schools were also where rich people could meet up with working class people on relatively equal footings. What did this mean in 2011? I went on to say something about more collaborative work, the breaking down of silos between disciplines and sent off the email. The next day Gary replied by saying that it needed to be more prescriptive, something like ‘making standards’. I didn’t really get what this meant but decided to write back and encouraged him to put his thoughts about research down on paper and to circulate them to the school management team. He said that he would try them out on some of his colleagues in his Department and see how they went down.

A number of thoughts went through my head at this stage: at what stage do I get more prescriptive and dictatorial in my management style; what about the role of self-doubt, am I actually convinced that my ideas are “right”? One of the things I have learned over the years of consulting with senior management is that people are people with all of the foibles that all of us carry. But they do have access to more information, (probably more timely information), and they do have power in the sense of responsibility for resources, but also power that is associated with the position. Things that I say do have a bearing on how they are perceived, greater than I am aware of. I have been surprised that phrases that I have been using now come back to me as the ‘accepted’ parlance of the group. Language and behaviour is starting to get embedded into the culture of the organisation. Staff are engaging with “what would an art school do” when it comes to some key decision making positions. For example, one of the art lecturers came to talk to me about buying a garden shed from B&Q, a local hardware merchant, as it was cheap and would provide an installation space for the students, but they didn’t think it was really a good idea. We talked about what they were trying to do and what the experience would be like for students, staff and visitors, and very quickly came to the conclusion that it probably wasn’t ‘on brand’ and that we should get the technicians to make us a large white box out of plywood sheeting. One week later, we had a large square space, made by the technicians and happily used by students to project onto and install in. A number of other decisions

have been made recently that have people discussing things without me present and it is starting to get established into the organisation.

In art and design practice I have found there to be an automatic opposition to the notion of corporate identity – it makes it feel institutionalised and hence too constraining and rigid. It is often associated with large organisations and not associated with smaller studio cultures that imply some sense of freedom and independence. However, there are still institutionalizing and organising norms and so it is worthwhile looking at what we mean by institutionalisation and organisation.

Institutionalisation and Organisation

The social world that we encounter is a world of institutionalized practices:

‘Knowledge about society is thus a *realization* in the double sense of the word, in the sense of apprehending the objectivated social reality, and in the sense of ongoingly producing this reality.’ [Berger & Luckmann (1967): p 84]

Institutions are therefore real because we think they are real and behave as if they are real. The logic of practice is negotiated by the reflexive consciousness of the actors, and because we are so engrossed in it and because it provides predictability in some ways, it permits us to exercise lower levels of attention than might otherwise be required in other areas of social activity. Organisations perpetuate these constraints through induction programmes. I completed my induction programme with the University last year and had to conduct one for a new member of staff just recently. In it we are asked to present templates for how things are to be done in the University. Berger & Luckmann draw on the work of Weber, broadening it to encompass more than the overtly political. In *The Social Construction of Reality* their model of cognition aims to address the structural-functionalism emphasis upon normative integration and values by presenting a process model, but they do not seem to take into account the gesture-response, cause-effect and reflexivity aspects that other writers have been developing in order to overcome some of the inherent paradoxes. Also, talking about institutionalisation does mean that they cover a far broader aspect of what I am interested in. Marriage is an institution. It has subtly different meanings

in different countries, but nonetheless it hangs together because people believe in it as a symbolic interaction. It also hangs together in the material sense in that there are expectations around domestic and economic practices of cohabitation, with associated rituals of how one is to behave when in the 'institution of marriage', with rituals that need to be attended to – whether secular or religious. Even without the full symbolic consecration of marriage, it is still possible to 'do it'. Indeed even if people are engaged in doing it without acknowledging the institution of it, there are still legal implications to some of the practices.

A university is an institution in two sense of the word: as an example of 'a university'; and then more specifically as YY University. As the former we have a rich tradition of practice embedded in a history of statutes, traditions, ideals of scholarship, rituals of consecration, funding mechanisms, recruitment, hierarchy etc. that guide some of our behaviours and extend back hundreds and hundreds of years. Even within this overarching tradition there are variances within the field of education that provide for different focuses and behaviours, leading to different understandings of 'universitiness'. More recently there has been another challenge to the institute of academic through the imposition of 'business' like behaviour, changing the way that universities need to conduct their work. With the latter, a university exists as a body of people, as a collection of buildings, campuses and spaces, as a social collection of certain types of expertise in which a common understanding of knowledge is emergent. Institutionalised forms can therefore be experienced as tangible in space and time. In Berger & Luckmann the distinction between habitualisation and institutionalisation is not always clear, and it is perhaps better to come back to Bourdieu's notion of habitus and Elias' notion of habitus. Berger & Luckmann also do not seem to adequately deal with aspects of power and compulsion, however, their account is useful in allowing us to think about institutionalisation, whether formal or loose. While not all institutions involve identification or membership, all collective identities, by definition, are institutionalized. Branding of organisations exists to try to communicate these institutes more explicitly through symbolic treatments.

The notion of habitus encourages us to think about the relationship between the individual and the institution. Being a university lecturer is an identification conferred in and by the institution of the university. It is a social construct that is recognized

fairly universally across countries and cultures. It locates the individual in relation to other individuals within the university, for example administrator, and also external to the institution, for example bankers. Institutions are therefore also sources and sites for individual identification. The roles within the institutions act as individual identifiers and indicators of what we do. Furthermore, there is additional differentiation through the designation of status within the institution, for example a senior lecturer, or a Professor. The label implies a certain position within the hierarchy and the status that is implied is an institutionalized identification viewed in the abstract as a 'collection of rights and duties' [Linton (1936): p 113]. The occupant of that role 'acts' in accordance with the expectations of that role, whether articulated, for example in statutes, or expected. The role therefore comes with aspects of performance (in a theatrical sense), the status-role dyad has aspects of Goffman's dramaturgical model and in some respects goes to the core of some of the questions I am asking of myself and staff – "what is it that we think we are doing together?". Even though Linton's concepts of status and role seem to me contrary to current thinking, especially around flat hierarchies, there is something in the notion of status as a collection of rights and duties that is of interest. Linton also states:

'A *status*, in the abstract, is a position in a particular pattern. It is thus quite correct to speak of each individual as having many statuses...However, unless the term is qualified in some way, the *status* of any individual means the sum total of all statuses that he occupies.' [Linton (1936): p 113]

This seems to be quite simplistic, but the interesting note is that individual identification is to a considerable extent a customized collage of collective identifications. How these are summed is not clear, but the multifaceted view aligns well with Mead's 'I-me' dialectic in that the 'me' is a socially constructed identification. Status as an emergent property of interaction is another way of making sense of how status as enacted by people in a social setting governs how we make sense of the individual in the role being enacted. I will look at this a little later.

Institutions for me have parallels with collective identities but it is not clear how they relate to the modern organisation. Organisations differ from institutions in that:

- there are always members
- members combine in the pursuit of explicit objectives
- there are criteria for recruitment of new members
- there is a division of labour
- there is a pattern for decision-making.

The sociological study of organisations is huge, building on Weber's initial observations about bureaucracy, there is a well established literature on formal organisations, but that is not really the purpose of this project. I am interested in the micro-interactions that occur within organisations and how they play out in the macro, and vice versa. Organisations are made up of actual individuals who have many other memberships. So while Gary is a key member of the School Management Team, he is also a member of the Design Department, as well as a member of the Royal Photographic Society. He also has various representations on other boards both internally (to the University) and externally. At some stages the requirements of these memberships may conflict, as I am finding with the issue of the research agenda. Many times Gary has said to me "with my research hat on, I need to make my Department accountable". The conversations within the Department are however still at the stage of establishing new identities following the restructure. It appears that the conversations within the Department are about the day-to-day activities around student teaching, predominantly undergraduate. Staff have been complaining about workloads and timetables and I think that, in the early months, Gary has taken a gentle approach with them, trying to get them to rethink their timetables. One of the reasons for asking me to take more 'ownership' of the decision to 'make' the staff do research I believe is so that Gary can remain a member of the Department identity. By me passing the mandate Gary can take the line that the decision is being forced on him and so distance himself from the 'hurt' that the staff will feel. I figure that some of the anxiety that Gary is feeling is coming out in his comments to me stating that Ron, my predecessor, would have forced the staff to do research, thus passing the ownership and agenda setting to someone else.

My aim is that I want people to make their own decisions. In the past two years, I have made open calls to staff for funding for research. This has been in three

categories, below £500 to kick start those with little track record, below £5,000 for larger projects and then over £5,000. There have been a number of small grants allocated this year (by a small committee headed by myself, Gary and another Head of Department), some middle grants but no large grants. I have purposefully not put a limit on the number of grants as I do not believe that we will be oversubscribed. The criteria has been loosely based around the external Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), with Impact scoring well. It has been pleasing to see a number of ‘non’ academics such as technicians apply and fit in the work in their normal workload – grants can be used to buy out time. Over the two years there has been some increase in conversations from Gary’s Department and one member has applied, after some gentle cajoling. He has since completed his first project, had a gallery show and a publication and is preparing a bigger grant for next year. This is a much slower way of working, but one that I personally feel more comfortable with. I asked Gary what his opinion was, bearing in mind the conversation we had had with Malcolm. Gary’s response was “it’s your School, and up to you how you choose to run it”. This irked me somewhat and so I asked Gary to hold a research day with the key researchers in the School and set up a pecha-kucha style of presentation. I have used this technique of 20 slides with 20 seconds a slide many times before. It allows many presentations to be conducted in a very short time thus making sure that people don’t get bored. It also has a way of leveling the playing field between experienced researchers/presenters and novices. Our Professor of Painting is our highest rated researcher, according to the previous RAE exercise. Marion has been at the University for over thirty years and has developed a little niche for herself managing a small number of painting postgraduate students. When I had joined she had complained about the lack of support for her research aspirations and acknowledgement of her standing in the field. I find Marion a talented and sensitive person, but fragile in the way that some artists seem to be, especially around self-worth and recognition. Last year the University asked Heads of School to nominate staff for a paid sabbatical year, and so I put Marion forward and she was accepted. I also knew that Marion had been successful in securing a number of solo gallery exhibitions in Berlin and New York at prestigious galleries, so was more than happy to support her as it would also meet my aspirations for putting the School on an international map. Marion was delighted, but then started to complain about her studio space where she had been for 20 years, paying £10 a week for a massive studio. My predecessor had moved to the

campus with the aim of making the building more cost efficient for the University. Since the changes in government funding, this campus had become a bit of a liability and so we had to make it 'work harder' for the costs we were putting into the maintenance and up keep of it. Instead of talking directly to Marion, Ron had spoken to everyone else and had started to marginalize her. He would take people into her studio without notice, he would double lock her doors and he would avoid meeting her, although she had asked for a meeting to discuss her future at the studio. Finally she had decided to move out and had managed to get a studio nearby, but paying commercial rates. The School provided the technician support to move the studio and also provided some research money towards the rent.

The research presentations were unfortunately during a reading week and so many of the staff were not available to attend. I was pleased to note that all of the key researchers in the School were either in attendance or had done a video recording of their presentation (6 minutes 40 seconds). All except Marion. Marion had told Gary that she was far too busy and that, in any case, she was not good at talking to people about her work. Gary came and saw me in the morning with the "I told you so" look, reinforcing his point that I needed to be stronger in my instructions to the staff. I agreed with him. In this instance I think a clear message needed to be sent out to a senior figure, especially with such a lame excuse. I told Gary I would deal with it. I sent her an email, copying in Gary, asking for Marion to come and see me urgently. It was quite a short email with minimal pleasantries and Marion replied straight away – there are some privileges to status and hierarchy.

The balance between being autocratic and being in open dialogue has been a theme that has come up many a time at work. The notion of a dialectical conversation that leads to us all developing a common understanding has been my main tool, certainly in the early stages of the job, but as time has gone on, I have found that sometimes we are not looking for dialogue but clear 'leadership' in order to get action. In the next section I want to explore these notions of dialogue and conversation.

Dialogue, Conversation and Discussion

Gadamer describes the process of conversation as:

‘... a process of two people understanding each other. Thus it is a characteristic of every true conversation that each opens himself to the other person, truly accepts his point of view as worthy of consideration and gets inside the other to such an extent that he understands not a particular individual, but what he says. The thing that has to be grasped is the objective rightness or otherwise of his opinion, so that they can agree with each other on a subject.’ [Gadamer (1979): p 347]

In this use of the word conversation, Gadamer takes an idealized view of an interaction between two people. For him, knowledge in a conversation is not a fixed thing or commodity to be grasped, waiting to be discovered. Rather it is an aspect of a process. He uses the metaphor of a horizon: we have our own ‘horizons of understanding...[that is] the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point’ [Gadamer (1979): p 143] With these pre-judgments and understandings we involve ourselves in what is being said. In conversation we try to understand a horizon that is not our own in relation to our own. For Gadamer, the concern is not to win the argument, but to advance understanding and human well being. Agreement cannot be imposed, but rests on common conviction [Habermas (1984): p 285]. In this, the understandings we bring from the past are tested in encounters with the present and form what we take into the future:

‘The horizon of the present is being continually formed, in that we have continually to test all our prejudices. An important part of that testing is the encounter with the past and the understanding of the tradition from which we come... In a tradition this process of fusion is continually going on, for there old and new continually grow together to make something of living value, without either being explicitly distinguished from the other.’ [Gadamer (1979): p 273]

Bohm also took a similar line with his process of dialogue. As a physicist he saw science as a quest for truth and ‘as with electrons, we must look on thought as a systematic phenomena arising from how we interact and discourse with one another’ [quoted in Senge (1990): p 240]. For Bohm Dialogue (with a capital ‘D’) was a distinct process, different from a discussion:

‘Dialogue, as we are choosing to use the word, is a way of exploring the roots of the many crises that face humanity today. It enables inquiry into, and understanding of, the sorts of processes that fragment and interfere with real communication between individuals, nations and even different parts of the same organization. In our modern culture men and women are able to interact with one another in many ways: they can sing dance or play together with little difficulty but their ability to talk together about subjects that matter deeply to them seems invariable to lead to dispute, division and often to violence. In our view this condition points to a deep and pervasive defect in the process of human thought.’ [Bohm, Factor and Garrett (1991): p 32]

Bohm presented three essential conditions for dialogue to take place: participants must suspend their assumptions; participants must view each other as colleagues or peers; and in the early stages, someone must facilitate the dialogue in order to hold the context.

Both Gadamer and Bohm provide a similar view of an ideal, virtuous process that engages people for the betterment of all. As much as I can see the intent behind these aspirations, as with brainstorming, I have never known this to work. But there are some basic assumptions in there that do interest me. Both Bohm and Senge differentiate between dialogue and discussion, liking discussion to the ‘bashing’ of viewpoints with the intention of convincing the other rather than of mutual discovery. This distinction is useful, especially as a manager. Numerous times I have been in the position of having to make a collective decision in School Management Teams because people are at odds. I have often used the term “after all, this is not a democracy”. In these situations I have had ‘discussions’ with people, which in conjunction with my status and role carries specific requirements. Although it would appear that discussions are therefore easy, I have often found them to be difficult in the sense that they are often made in situations of conflict.

With Marion, I met her alone initially and then later with Gary. I started the conversation by stating that I wanted to have an “open” dialogue with her about roles and responsibilities. I was very careful in the tone and manner of my language. In the

Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire suggests that dialogue cannot occur between those who feel that they do not have a right to speak, whether it is a real denial or a perceived one. When considering the conditions for conversation, issues of mutual trust, respect, a willingness to listen and risk one's opinion come to the fore. I had taken pains to establish this 'ideal speech situation' [Habermas (1979)] but it did not go too well. Marion went quiet and started to cry, stating that she was overworked, there were too many deadlines looming and no one understood the pressure she had been under the last few years. I said some soothing words and then tried again to open up the conversation, starting with the subject of practice, how was hers going, how was she reflecting on it – trying to make the conversation more personal and about her. After about half an hour, we did get onto the subject of expectations, what Marion expected from me and what I could expect from her. She was very clear of what she expected from me – support, acknowledgement – but a little less clear on what I and we could expect from her beyond teaching. We talked a little about the term 'professor' and the status and expectations that it carried, certainly from my viewpoint. She stated that YY University did not really understand what a professor was and that she had given up trying. I asked her if she would be keen on doing a professorial address to staff and students, and that we should try and behave "as if" we were a "proper" university. She thought it was a good idea and agreed to be the lead for the School, and the University. We penciled in November, when the students would be back and the rush of new first years had calmed down. The meeting with Gary went well after that. Time will tell if there has been an actual change.

In the movement of social relations, actions and ideas still have to be justified, people have to talk and be convinced. If Marion had not been the person she was, would I have taken a different approach? If Marion had not cried, would I have been firmer at the start? If Marion had not 'joined in' would I have issued an instruction? I don't believe I would have issued an instruction but would have set up a few more meetings before getting heavier handed in the hope that I could convince her. Habermas claimed that as long as there was conversation, there was hope: 'gentle but obstinate, a never silent although seldom redeemed claim to reason' [Habermas (1979): p 3]. Goffman refers to this as the requirement to demonstrate sanity. There are also issues of improvisation in the theatrical sense that we bring to the situation. A number of my staff are on the autism spectrum and have some issues in recognizing social cues. In

social situations we have to be attuned to what responses are coming back to our gestures and adapt what we were going to say, or perhaps the way we were going to say it, or perhaps not say it at all. The rules of good improvisation require the participants to not close down conversations but provide an opportunity for the other(s) to build on what has presented. Once again, from an idealised perspective this requires the people taking part to have a collective sense of what is being achieved as opposed to an individual sense. In *Re-Viewing the Organization* Tsoukas encourages us to look again at the temporal conversations that happen in organisations and to consider the processes of improvisation that we bring to the conversations. He states that the dominant theory is context free and that business models pay, at best, lip service to the context and we should pay attention to the different agents we are dealing with and the dynamic ongoing conversations that take place between them. In periods of change, attention to these conversations becomes more and more important.

Traditional approaches to organisational change have been dominated by assumptions of heading towards stability, routine and order, with the underlying ideology that we move from one static situation to another, or as Lewins (1951) called “unfreezing-moving-freezing”. A result of this is that organisational change has been reified and treated as exceptional rather than natural. However, if we focus at a micro-interaction level we do notice that although things may look the same at the surface, the micro-interactions are constantly in movement. There is constant ‘life’ happening:

‘What really *exists* is not things made but things in the making. Once made, they are dead, and an infinite number of alternative conceptual decompositions can be used in defining them. But put yourself *in the making* by a stroke of intuitive sympathy with the thing and, the whole range of possible decompositions coming into your possession, you are no longer troubled with the question which of them is the more absolutely true. Reality *falls* in passing into conceptual analysis; it *mounts* in living its own undivided life – it buds and burgeons, changes, and creates.’ [James (1909/1996): p. 263-264 – emphases in the original]

Tsoukas and Chia (2002) argue that change “is the reweaving of actors’ webs of beliefs and habits of action to accommodate new experiences obtained through interactions. Insofar as this is an ongoing process, that is to the extent that actors try to make sense of and act coherently in the world, change is inherent in human action, and organizations are sites of continuously evolving human action.” According to Stacey, strategy and identity are inextricably linked. He says that strategy is “the evolving narrative pattern of organisational identity. It is the evolving pattern of what an organisation is.” [Stacey (2005): p 435]. In this view, organisation is inextricably linked to what it is that we do together and is a pattern that is constituted, shaped and emerging from change. If organisational change is viewed as deterministic, its dynamic, unfolding and emergent qualities are devalued and lost from view, and it could be argued that it is in this process of interaction that the process of identification also emerges. As Orlikowski (1996) notes there is an ideology of stability and alignment that drives current literature and conversations: ‘for decades, questions of transformation remained largely backstage as organisational thinking and practice engaged in a discourse dominated by questions of stability’ [Orlikowski (1996): p 63]. Weick (1998) also points out the problems that this viewpoint has when it comes to talking about ‘improvisation’ in a meaningful way. The dominant literature on change presents models of change programmes that, when detailed in ethnographic studies, show that these processes need to be *made* to work on any given occasion and do not actually work themselves out [Barley (1990); Boden (1994); Orlikowski (1996)]. These models “work” only when animated by actors who fine-tune and adjust the processes to suit.

It’s not a Democracy

In the conversation with Gary about Marion, I had use the phrase “it’s not a democracy” making a comment on two counts, one to assert some of my authority and secondly to make the obvious statement that there was a ‘corporate agenda’. There is therefore an overall agenda that ‘open’ dialogue needs to be directive towards action in line with the aims and purposes of the organisation – more precisely the paymasters. Over the recent years I have become more and more interested in the notion of democracy, and recent deliberations in the European Union have brought attention to the notion of democracy and its limitations. Arundhati Roy, in her book

Listening to Grasshoppers: Field Notes on Democracy, grapples with what happens once ‘democracy has been used up’. She aims to look at the world’s largest democracy, India, with a view to making sense of life after democracy – not the ideal or aspirational nature of democracy, but the working model of modern liberal democracy with all its flaws and imperfections. In Britain, Prime Minister Cameron is championing the Big Society in which the ‘crowd’ makes the decisions about policies and where money is spent. There is an idealized view of democracy, how it operates and its value to society. In *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, Schumpeter argued that with the development of mass democracy, popular sovereignty as understood by the classical model of democracy had become inadequate. A new understanding of democracy was required without the emphasis on aggregation of preferences. With the ubiquity of the internet, this may be nearer to being achieved, but what will this actually mean? The dominance of the aggregative view with its reduction of democracy to procedures for the treatment of interest groups’ pluralism is what the new wave of Big Society is proposing. The approach is based on promoting a form of *normative* rationality, which, unlike previous Marxist critics, stresses the central role of liberal values in the modern conception of democracy. Everyone is sitting broadly in the centre, with a lean to the left or the right. The central claim seems to be that it is possible, because of procedures of deliberation, to reach forms of agreement that would satisfy both rationality (understood as the defence of liberal rights) and democratic legitimacy (understood as popular sovereignty). In *Between Facts and Norms* Habermas makes it clear that one of the objectives of his procedural theory of democracy is to bring to the fore the co-originality of fundamental individual rights and of popular sovereignty. Habermas defends what he claims to be a strictly proceduralist approach in which there are no limits to the scope and content of deliberation by advocating the ‘ideal speech situation’. This viewpoint realizes the condition of the ‘ideal discourse’: the more equal and impartial, the more open the process and the less the participants are coerced and guided by force, the more likelihood that truly generalisable interests will be proposed and accepted. Habermas contends that his process approach is superior to other methods because it leaves more questions open. This is once again an idealized view of individuals’ motives, and, even if we do leave aside a less optimistic view of the process, there is still an assumption that we have the same understandings in the language that we are using. ‘So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false. It is

what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in forms of life' [Wittgenstein (1953): p 88]. According to Wittgenstein, to agree on the definition of a term is not enough – we also need to agree on the way we use it; 'if language is to be a mean of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments' [Wittgenstein (1953): p 88]. For him, procedures only exist as a complex collection of practices. Those practices constitute specific forms of individuality which make possible the adherence to procedures. It is because of shared forms of life and agreements in judgments that procedures can be accepted and followed. For Wittgenstein, rules are abridgments of practices and are inseparable from specific forms of life. It is therefore not possible to maintain a separation between "procedural" and "substantial" or "moral" and "ethical" as advocated by Habermas. Procedures always involve substantial ethical commitments and there can never be such a thing as a purely neutral procedure. Wittgenstein goes on to say 'giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end; but the end is not certain propositions striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting* that is at the bottom of the language-game' [Wittgenstein (1969): p 28]. Contrary to deliberative democracy, such a viewpoint implies a limit to consensus: 'where two principles really do meet which cannot be reconciled with one another, then each man declares the other a fool and an heretic. I said I would combat the other man, but wouldn't I give him reasons? Certainly; but how far do they go? At the end of reasons comes persuasion' [Wittgenstein (1969): p 81].

If we are to take up pluralism seriously then we have to let go of the concept of a rational consensus. 'We have got on to the slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk: so we need *friction*. Back to the rough ground' [Wittgenstein (1958): p 46]. In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* Laclau & Mouffe argue that social objectivity is constituted through acts of power. They present the viewpoint of "agonistic pluralism" in which the aim is to construct a "them" in such a way that it is no longer perceived as an enemy to be destroyed. They differentiate between "politics" and "the political".

'By "the political", I refer to the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in

human relations, antagonism that can take many forms and emerge in different type of social relations. “Politics”, on the other hand, indicates the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions which seek to establish a certain order and organize human coexistence in conditions that are always potentially conflictual because they are affected by the dimension of “the political”. I consider that it is only when we acknowledge the dimension of “the political” and understand that “politics” consists in domesticating hostility and in trying to defuse the potential antagonism that exists in human relations, that we can pose what I take to be the central question for democratic politics.’ [Mouffe (2000): p 15]

By asserting the hegemonic nature of social relations and identities, the hope is that they present a more realistic model of democracy, which acknowledges the real nature of the process and the forms of exclusion that they entail.

In the branding world the issue of organisational alignment, ie we all ‘buy in’ to the proposition and will all enact it, is central to many of the ideologies underlying the main models. The propositions have been arrived at through consultation that gives the semblance of a democratic process, but the judgments that are made are fairly arbitrary in that the consultants discount certain viewpoints and aim to make some sense of the multitude of opinions, personalities and strategies presented. Branding by definition is an abstraction and a construct of reality – it is not reality itself. To get to this abstraction decisions need to be made and it is often a conflictual process in which ‘someone’ has to make some decisions. Brand is a social and political construct and presents abstracted claims about the collection of people represented. For an art school we have an image of ourselves that is paradoxical with this approach, in that one of the key aspects of artists is that we want to be different – but also be accepted for that difference. There is always a tension between the institutional image and the maverick studio image, in some respects that tension between the individual and society.

Durkheim was influenced by a number of key theoretical viewpoints on society of which three were quite significant. The first was Comte’s perspective on scientific methodology which helped Durkheim develop a systematic method for investigating

society. Second were the debates in France related to the problems of individualism – bearing in mind France was in a deep political crisis, which had led to a decline in national unity. The resulting social and political changes had a significant influence on Durkheim's thinking. The third major influence was derived from the political writings of Hobbes and Rousseau, whose individualist doctrines tended to trace the origins of society to individual human nature. While French society endorsed the concept of the individual at the political level, at another level many believed that the focus on the individual tended to undermine the authority of collective concepts of society and the state. According to Durkheim 'social life would not be possible unless there were interests that were superior to the interests of the individual' [*Individualism and the Intellectuals*, Durkheim (1898) translated Political Studies, 17, 1969: p 20]. He opposed the predominant intellectual viewpoints as presented by Mill and Bentham, which placed the individual at the centre of social life. They asserted that individuals act on their free will and are autonomous and self determined and that individuals have common motives that compel them to realize their self-interest by private economic gain. In this view, individual social action was based on economic interchanges with society, but beyond this the individual owed nothing to society. Durkheim was in direct opposition to this. He asserted that this tendency to reduce society to individuals led the utilitarians to ignore the larger system of social rules which acted as constraints on individual action. Secondly he reasoned that since society is always prior to the individual historically, then society alone must shape the individual dispositions and beliefs. Thirdly he argued that since society comes first, individuals are not analytically separate from it. In this viewpoint, individuals are neither separable from society nor are they to be studied independently of it since they are part of the total social whole. This is reflected in the viewpoint taken up through complex responsive processes.

Hobbes also influenced Durkheim's thinking, but while Hobbes' theory of the political state was one of the first to highlight the restraining nature of society, Durkheim disagreed with the emphasis that Hobbes placed on the individual as the origin of society. Durkheim disagreed with Hobbes' individualist doctrine on many fronts, and suggested that constraint springs from collective life rather than from the individual. Rousseau also gave importance to human nature in the formation of society. He reasoned that when society is formed it tends to create private property

and self-interest, which result in jealousy and competition between individuals. He went on to argue that the act of pooling individual wills would produce the collective will of society and believed that society was a reflection of individual will. Durkheim, once again rejected the prioritizing of the individual, although his views of society did parallel those of Rousseau. In the *Division of Labor* Durkheim's explicit focus is on social solidarity: 'why do individuals, while becoming more autonomous, depend more upon society? How can they be at once more individual and solidary?' [Durkheim (1933): p 37]. Durkheim expressed two different types of solidarity: 'mechanical' and 'organic'. Societies whose solidarity is mechanical are based on common roots of identity and similarity [Durkheim (1933): p 129-132; 116; 147-173]. Individuals are directly connected to society through various points of attachment which act to bind all the members equally. The social links discourage individual autonomy and there is little difference between the individual conscience and the collective conscience. Collective rules and practices are predominantly 'religious' in nature and pervade every aspect of life. Societies of this type tend to be characterized by:

- a small and isolated homogenous population
- a division of labour based on social cooperation with little or no specialisation
- a system of social beliefs which is uniformly distributed throughout the society
- a low degree of individual autonomy

It is interesting to note that the dominant model of brand strategy hints at this type of society: there is a single vision that everyone 'buys' into and believes, behaviours and language are moderated, controlled and uniform, across the whole organisation.

Durkheim believed here was a move from mechanical societies to organic societies. In organic societies, Durkheim states, labour is specialized and individuals are linked more to each other than they are to society as a whole. The nature of these links to each other stems from the development of the division of labour [Durkheim (1933): p 181-229]. Organic solidarity is characterized by:

- larger populations spread over broader geographic areas
- an increased complexity of division of labour leading to specialized economic functions which become interdependent

- a system of social relations in which individuals are linked to each other by social contracts rather than obligation
- a system in which individuals obtain their place by occupancy rather than kinship
- an increased individual autonomy based on a system of laws recognizing rights and freedoms

At a superficial level, this seems to be more in line with the modern organisation, and certainly a university. The collective is dependent on individuals working together with a coordinated division of labour, interdependent, with a greater importance on the social relationships between people. Individuals are functionally interconnected through the division of labour since they are reliant on others for what they cannot do on their own. Specialisation creates different interests among people and they end up being able to share common interests with people with similar practices. Durkheim argues that, taken further, people become more associated with their occupational spheres. Under these circumstances, individuals can begin to 'pick and choose' only those values, beliefs and social attachments relative to their own occupational experiences and this reduces their direct link to society. In an academic setting this can be seen in the various subject groups that form a stronger identity than, say, the University.

If the groupings are so strongly embedded in their areas of practice, how does one then affect change? How does one purposefully try and change some of the behaviours? This happens a lot when a new person comes in to an organisation, especially in a position of authority, when external factors have a major bearing on the relationships, when policies change what is rewarded etc. How does one intentionally try to instigate new patterns of interactions and behaviours?

Intentionality

Intentionality was coined by the Scholastics in the Middle Ages and derives from the Latin verb *intend* meaning to point (at), aim (at) or extend (toward). **Intentionality** was initially re-introduced by 19th century philosopher Franz Brentano and later adopted by Husserl as a principle to distinguish acts that are intentional and acts that

are not. Husserl was interested in developing a general theory of inferential systems. His approach was to study the units of consciousness that speakers present themselves as having – that he “gives voice to” – in expressing their position. These units of consciousness he labels *intentional acts* or *intentional experiences*, since they always represent something as something—thus exhibiting what Brentano called intentionality. What distinguishes intentional from non-intentional experiences is the former's having intentional content. Intentionality in art is often linked to a hermeneutic approach; in William Irwin's *Intentionalist Interpretation* (1991) there is an investigation of the nature of intentions and their role in the creative process. Husserl contended that the notion of intentionality was the main characteristic of mental processes, differentiating them from physical processes. Every mental phenomenon, every psychological act has a content and is directed towards an object. This separation of the mental and the physical led to a number of philosophers becoming more precise about the type of intentionality they were referring to, with most implying that there is no teleological import. From a practice perspective, a number of artists refer to themselves as ‘partial intentionalists’ in that they intend a conscious meaning but leave aspects to interpretation by the reader. The avant garde film director, Jean Luc Godard said “don't show all sides of things. Leave yourself a margin of/for Vagueness”.

If branding is about the making of a promise, or the guarantee of a certain type of behaviour or performance, then there is intentionality in the gesture. The context of this is usually, but not always, on the area of business, but more recently there has been a growing trend for organisations to take a more social and cultural role – ethics in business is a growing area of activity. Organisations are making promises about their intent to the environment, to local society. The messages are consistent and repetitive. Repetition is a strong element of the gesture – for behaviours to change, management must stick, single-mindedly, to their goals [Aaker (1996)]. Branding has become more about creating mantras for people to recite and follow so that the changes and self-belief is institutionalized into their language, their behaviour and their culture. Bourdieu would argue that any community of practice has its own distinct language and use of language that indicates membership and identity. The concepts of branding are therefore inherent in group identities. If branding is an indication of intent then these can be called to account through actions. If branding

was to be seen as action oriented then branding must be linked to what it is the organisation does rather than just the articulation of the intent. The trend in branding discourse is about brands becoming more “human”. I assume this to mean that brands need to be less static and mono-dimensional, but also be less idealized, and more realistic in sense. From the sociological viewpoint, this means that “brand” has to be understood from a more sociological perspective and exists in a context. The brand promise becomes less deterministic and more of an aspiration, leaving space for spontaneity and ‘vagueness’. By abstracting later in the relationship we can maintain more of the complexity of everyday life. Action, however, requires us to make sense in a more deliberative way and hence for action to take place there must be some element of abstraction otherwise the deliberative process would be ongoing. The challenge from a brand perspective is to strike the balance between intentionality and openness, the negotiation between what we believe to be the purpose of the organisation in the context of what the interactions will allow to happen. A key factor in this negotiation is the language used, the messages that are conveyed and how they are conveyed. In some respects it is a branding exercise in that repetition is important and that consistency and coherence are important, although one must also be listening and improvising to what comes back from those gestures. In my early days as a senior manager I would behave as one of the ‘regular’ workers and would openly engage in gossip and the hidden transcripts that occur, but I soon realized that these could often be major obstacles to trying to get people to take me seriously, take my intent seriously and would sometimes undermine my authority. My language and behaviour started to become more idealised, certainly in the more public settings – more dramaturgical.

Language and Behaviour

There are many surveys of business leaders in the business journals asking for the key traits or talents that they should have as successful CEO. One of the most frequently mentioned trait is that a CEO must convey “a strong sense of vision”; they also mentioned “strategy formulation to achieve a vision”. The dominant management model is of a leader “painting a castle in the sky and then providing the steps to reach it”. Now that my first year of redundancies and cuts has gone, there seems to be a growing interest in what I see as my vision for the School. This has been said to me a

number of times, with eager anticipation. I have started to conduct all-staff meetings each term in which I provide an opportunity for people to ask me about what is happening in the University as a whole and for questions and answers. Many of the questions have focused on the macro-economic climate, but some have focused on our identity and status within the world of art schools. This may have been instigated by me, as I have been having many conversations, in small groups and large groups, around two key themes of “what is it that we think we are doing together” and “where do we fit in the UK landscape of art schools”. In public forums we tend to be a lot more arrogant and smug about our place, but in smaller groups we tend to be more insecure, and I believe more realistic. I have been talking a lot about not being complacent about our ability to recruit, especially in this coming year of tripling tuition fees. It is interesting to note that the phrase “only the paranoid survive” used in one of my talks has started to come back to me.

The use of language, in particular mantras or soundbites has been a key aspect of branding. At one level it can be about control and the restriction of language. Social control is often about a constraint on behaviour and taken to an extreme can be about limiting what people can say –essentially what they can think. Brand guidelines are issued to organisations to restrict how they use their visual language. In some instances there are also language style guides that restrict use of certain phrases. According to Bourdieu & Wacquant this is occurring in everyday language as media becomes more uniform and more ubiquitous:

‘In a matter of a few years, in all the advanced societies, employers, international officials, high-ranking civil servants, media intellectuals and high-flying journalists have all started to speak a strange Newspeak. Its vocabulary, which seems to have sprung out of nowhere, is now on everyone’s lips: ‘globalization’ and ‘flexibility’, ‘governance’ and ‘employability’, ‘underclass’ and ‘exclusion’, ‘new economy’ and ‘zero tolerance’, ‘communitarianism’ and ‘multiculturalism’, not to mention their so-called postmodern cousins, ‘minority’, ‘ethnicity’, ‘identity’, ‘fragmentation’, etc.. The diffusion of this new planetary vulgate -- from which the terms ‘capitalism’, ‘class’, ‘exploitation’, ‘domination’, and ‘inequality’ are conspicuous by their absence, having been peremptorily dismissed under the

pretext that they are obsolete and non-pertinent -- is the result of a new type of imperialism whose effects are all the more powerful and pernicious in that it is promoted not only by the partisans of the neoliberal revolution who, under cover of ‘modernization’, intend to remake the world by sweeping away the social and economic conquests of a century of social struggles, henceforth depicted as so many archaisms and obstacles to the emergent new order, but also by cultural producers (researchers, writers and artists) and left-wing activists who, for the vast majority of them, still think of themselves as progressives.’ [Bourdieu & Wacquant (2001) article in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 554, May 2000; p 6-7].

Orwell coined the term ‘newspeak’ in his novel *1984* as a means the state used to reduce language and hence how people spoke, communicated and thought. At this extreme, this can certainly be the case, but the use of limited phrases can be useful in instilling some aspect of common understanding. The role of repetition in communication can be an essential part of conveying and establishing meaning.

This creation of mantras seems to operate in a similar way to gossip in organisations in that people are very quick to pick up some phrases and repeat them. Experimenting in the School I have tried to drop a number of key phrases into conversations: “the makery”, “industrial craft”, “what is it that we are doing together”. I have made a conscious effort to repeat them as often as I can, along with a dramatic pause to place an emphasis on them in the sentence. It is pleasing to note that some of the phrases have started to come back to me from others with some staff members using them regularly and owning them. Gary commented recently when we were sitting having a reflective coffee after an exam board that the School had moved quite a way in the types of conversations that were now taking place (not all good) and that no one had really noticed. There was now an active engagement in talking about the student experience, although this was sometimes used as an argument between academics and technicians, but at least students were now being considered in our deliberations. In terms of identity formation, there are now some common phrases that are used by staff and starting to become representative of the emerging identity in the School. Maintenance of these conversations has become a core focus of my leadership. The language used may have emanated from me in this context but it needs to be tailored

to fit the collective. The School has a practical outlook and so esoteric concepts and language seems to be an awkward fit, however there appears to be a lot of appetite for pragmatic thought, especially an approach that does not separate thought and action, subject and object, mind and body. Then again, this could be a self-selecting viewpoint, as my role does put me in a place where I can get space to talk.

Charisma

A major aspect of being heard and taken seriously by people is about how one is perceived in that particular social setting. Charisma is seen as an important aspect of leadership and there is a lot written about charismatic leadership with the implication that charisma is something that one has, people see it and acknowledge it. The concept of charisma as developed by Weber, and its extension, are important for the understanding of the processes of institution building. In much of the sociological literature, there appears to be a separation between the charismatic aspects and the more ordinary, routine aspects of social organisation – indeed Weber himself stressed this dichotomy. However, it seems to me that there is a connection between charisma and the ability of an individual to improvise in their social setting. In conversation with Gary we were talking about a possible vision for the research agenda around which we could all gel and which could provide some sense of direction and decision-making. Gary's suggestion was "making standards", which I am not sure I entirely understood, but I was happy for Gary to experiment and play with it for a while. He said that he would try it out in a Departmental meeting and see how it went down. I caught up with some of the staff after the meeting, which was also attended by EE, our HR representative. HR have decided that their role is now business support, and in that capacity they are going to come and coach senior managers on aspects of their practice. EE reported back to me that Gary had indeed presented his ideas to the Department but had been unable to present well as there were many questions, many conversations and many ideas. EE said that up until then, when the meeting was structured, Gary had managed things well and kept an even keel, but when it came to more free flowing discussions he had been unable to interact at a creative, human and spontaneous level. She was recommending that we provide Gary with training in anxiety management and also in how to deal with questions. I was interested in this from a number of viewpoints, more importantly about the ability to deal with

questions, think on your feet or ‘jam’ with people. I think there is something in this ability to play off other people, to make it okay for them to play off you and to improvise that leads to some sense of charismatic behaviour and performance. Leadership is a dramaturgical process that requires people to collude in the performance – leadership without followers is effectively going for a walk on your own. Some of the basic rules about improvisation are to make sure that you do not paint your partner into a corner and close them down, but give them something to build on. Creative sessions that have worked well in my experience have been when people have bounced off each other in positive ways. The energy in the room is significantly improved and often people leave feeling happy. I have also noticed when I have met ‘celebrities’ known for their creativity and leadership, that they have tended to be good listeners and have responded to what has been said to them.

For Weber, freedom, creativity and personal responsibility did not lie outside the scope of society, of social relations and activities. On the contrary his focus was on the interpersonal relations, organisational and institutional structures in which creativity, freedom and personal responsibility could be manifest. His most general concerns were in the processes of institution building, social transformation and cultural creativity. He developed his study of individual freedom and creativity around the concept of *charisma* which he described as ‘a certain quality of an individual’s personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional qualities’ [Weber (1947): p 329]. Furthermore it is essential that the charismatic individual be recognized as such, ie it arises in the social, ‘this recognition is a matter of complete personal devotion arising out of enthusiasm, or of despair and hope’ [Weber (1947): p 359]. Weber links charisma to leadership in that it is essentially about change, there is therefore an intense and personal nature to the response to charisma. ‘the authority of the leader does not express the ‘will’ of his followers, but rather their duty or obligation’ [Weber (1947): p 65]. According to Weber charismatic groups do not have elaborate systems of roles, rules and procedures to guide the performance of administrative structures. The claim is that the charismatic situation is the antithesis of the ‘routine’ of organized social institutions and relations. It has elements of improvisation and responsiveness to the emergent properties of the current social patterns. Weber goes on to say that charismatic activities, because of

their close relations to the sources of social and cultural creativity, can contain tendencies toward the destruction and decomposition of institutions. He then seems to contradict, or develop, his ideas into suggesting that the test of any great charismatic leader lies in not only in their ability to disrupt and create a single event or great movement, but in their ability to leave a continuous impact on an institutional structure. He tries to bring together the dichotomy between the charismatic and the orderly regular routine of social organisation by differentiating between situations of extreme and intensive social disorganisation and change and routine. Weber uses this to differentiate the senior role from the charismatic role.

Weber writes that there are three pure types of legitimate authority:

- rational grounds based on a belief in the legality of the authority (legal authority)
- traditional grounds based on established beliefs of tradition and legitimacy (traditional authority)
- charismatic grounds based on the devotion to the specific character of the individual and the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him (charismatic authority).

Weber takes the concept of “charisma” as the “gift of grace” from early Christian writings and places a lot of emphasis on ‘a greater goal’ and ethical behaviour.

Charisma seems to reflect the aspiration of the artist in the collective: at the same time wanting to be part of the collective but then also wanting to be seen as separate from it; accepting the role in society but then trying to subvert it. At a less esoteric level than Weber, there is an ongoing tension between institutional and outsider, that is inherent in every group, perhaps more so in artist communities.

Conclusions

When thinking about identity in branding terms, the dominant model is one of establishing the shared vision and values and, through leadership and some printed collateral sharing it with staff and, through repetition and strict adherence to the brand guidelines, the culture will become as we intended. This is problematic from a number of viewpoints, it is based on a communication model of sender-receiver and

assumes that people will assimilate the content of the message and change their behaviour accordingly. There is some recognition that people will come to this conclusion at different times, but this does not, in my experience, reflect how people interact with each other.

From a complex responsive process perspective we are engaged in a continual process of social interaction when we come together. We are constantly negotiating and evolving the emerging identity that arises between us as well as being formed by the emergent identity. In this sense identity emerges from negotiation and from interaction, it is therefore emergent, dynamic and unpredictable. Within this dynamic of people coming together there are various power and status relationships that can have an impact or dominance in the process, but the take up of these gestures is again unpredictable and a processual dramaturgical interplay. As a senior manager in the process, my role has some imbued power associated with it in the organisation and through policy change and coercive power there is some modicum of social control, however there is also the power and associated charisma that arises in the social between the members taking part in the interaction. This arising charismatic role can result in the adoption of mannerisms and language by members of the organisation, including the “leader” who is also affected by this ongoing process. The group starts to adopt some key phrases, and I have noticed that repetition is quite useful in establishing some mantra and key statements which are then repeated back. Through this process of institutionalisation, the identity of the group starts to move, perhaps not in the direction intended, perhaps not as fast as anticipated, but it changes and evolves. It is interesting to note that a number of staff have said “we have come such a long way from where we were just two years ago”. My predecessor, in a back-handed comment stated that “he did not recognize the place”. This, I believe, is a combination of physical changes to the building, the furniture and the finishes, but also to do with the conversations that are taking place, what the group articulates as important and also in the work being produced. This process of institutionalisation of key messages, stories, gestures and outputs has started to affect the culture.

If we view the practice of identity as a theory of action, then it is through the social interactions within the group that we start to notice how identity evolves. Branding techniques of presenting symbols and repetition of language helps to provide

transitional objects through the process, but it is not predictable how these will be taken up, how they will be interpreted and how they will then be played back. The process of institutionalisation of these key identifiers back into the group of people is also affected by the status that is given to roles of anticipated power as well as the status afforded to some people. Not all people are equal in influence, but there does seem to be a collective agreement that emerges about the importance of some people's voices. Charisma as a social construct arises between people and makes the association of some form of superhuman ability to some people. The person's attributes are then taken on by others in the group, with emulation of language, mannerisms and phrases. The charismatic person becomes a social object and is emulated. This could be a paralyzing influence, in that people then become reliant on that individual for guidance and comment before action takes place.

Looking at the social interactions as a temporal process provides a way of making sense of the ongoing process of identity formation and institutionalisation which results in an ongoing evolution of group identity and organisational identity. There are still some key questions around the role of the individual in the social – especially around creative action. If one of the key brand messages is about being curious and creative, what does this mean for the individual and for the creative act? This will form the start of the inquiry for the next project.

Project Four: Deliberate Strategic Change and Dynamics of Identity Formation

The new Vice Chancellor has arrived. After all the waiting and all the anticipation – and imbuing the role with superhuman powers and attributes – we have discovered that she is only human. This project looks at the first few weeks of the tenure, to try to make sense of what is going on for me, how it is informing processes of identity formation and my practice as a dean of school trying to manage in a situation that is dynamic for me personally, for the organisation and for the Higher Education sector as a whole.

In Project 2 I wrote about my experiences as the newcomer coming in to the art school and trying to establish myself, to get to know the members of the organisation and also to instigate change. The change I ended up instigating was driven by the need to make redundancies in response to a direct order from the Vice Chancellor. This had an impact on not only the nervousness of staff and faculty but also on me as I became worried about being seen as the ‘hatchet man’ coming in to the organisation to clean out the old guard. In parallel I also instigated a process of identity formation for the School, wrapped in a rebranding exercise. Now I was seen as part of the establishment, although I had been in the university less than four years, and the incoming CEO would be embarking on a process of strategic change herself, with a view to developing a new identity for the organisation.

Key areas of interest are the interactions that took place in the first few weeks, especially with regards to the process of vision and strategy development. I am particularly interested in the process that develops the public narrative from a viewpoint of power relations; how this affects identity formation in the groups, and for me personally, and then how I find myself behaving in my role. I am interested in the heightened expectations and the heightened anxiety that is caused by someone with power coming in to the organisation, the change in conversations that take place and the new configurations of relating that have started to form as people try to develop mechanisms to cope with the change and the growing anxiety.

No more honeymoons

Over recent years considerable attention has been paid to the role of new CEOs, Presidents and Prime Ministers coming into their posts and the heavy expectations that are placed on them. The notion of the ‘honeymoon period’ as an opportunity for the incoming executive to take their time, get to know people and systems before implementing any change has changed significantly; the focus is now the first 90 days in office [Watkins (2003)]. There is further commentary on this in Tony Blair’s biography in which he says that he should have made more changes in the first few months of his tenure – a sentiment echoed by David Cameron and also by the new Vice Chancellor. The implication seems to be that significant change can only occur in the first few months of interaction, the explanation being that after six months the new CEO has “gone native” and therefore will not be in a position to make changes. This seems to be reflected in the continuing trend of senior executive posts being for short terms, typically three to four years. There have been many studies looking at incoming CEOs from a number of perspectives for many years.

‘Growing evidence in the executive succession literature and the business press makes clear that new CEOs often attempt to introduce strategic change upon entering their jobs. Yet strategy researchers have generally neglected to document the internal dynamics of these interventions, and many scholars remain pessimistic about the likelihood of success.’ [Greiner & Bhambri (1989): p 67].

Greiner & Bhambri go on to define what they mean by strategic change and then present an approach they call “comprehensive/collaborative” that attempts to take a more *deliberate* and *emergent* approach to strategic change. They qualify their model by suggesting that the extent of success depends on the situational match between the CEO’s approach to intervention, political behaviour in the executive team, and the unfolding dynamics of the intervention process.

Watkins, on the other hand, is much more optimistic about the performance of new CEOs and their interventions, presenting four chapters to success. In the first phase one must create momentum: ‘capturing and channeling energies’, ‘she must proceed

in ways that are consistent with her personal leadership style, leveraging its strengths and compensating for its weaknesses' [Watkins (2003): p. 38]. The next phase is to secure early wins which, according to Watkins, must be tangible, so improving the effectiveness of meetings or feel-good factors are not deemed to qualify as early wins. In this stage the CEO must create models of behaviour and identify a 'centre of gravity' from which to build the platform of success through prioritisation, leverage, measurement and specificity. Phase three is about laying a foundation through visioning, building a political base and changing culture. The fourth chapter deals with the issue of building credibility. Here Watkins presents the tensions that the CEO must navigate: how to be demanding, but able to be satisfied; accessible but not too familiar; decisive but not judicious; focused but flexible; active without causing commotion; and willing to make the tough calls but be humane [Watkins (2003): p 98].

Watkins published an article in Harvard Business Review analysing Barrack Obama's first 90 days as President, giving him a grade for each phase against his model for success. Watkins acknowledges the complexities of interaction but assumes a rational choice theory of strategic change in which the new CEO can behave completely independently of the dynamics of the organisation. This autonomous behaviour, regardless of notions of habitus, is problematic from a complex responsive process perspective. It assumes an idealised model of consensus building among the political base and a singular approach to identity and action, presenting a view of strategy and planning that emphasises widespread public participation and sharing of information. In some respects VC2 has followed many aspects of this model – I am convinced that she has a copy of the book as a significant amount of the language she is using resonates with the text. It is interesting to note and compare with the management by North Korea of the first 90 days of Kim Jong-un. The North Korean government were very quick to create momentum around the premiere by immediately positioning his economic agenda by criticising the largess of the Chinese, conducting a ballistic missile test to secure some early "wins" and trying to establish an image distinct from that of his father. To establish a human side, North Koreans were told that Kim Jong-un had a wife and there were numerous photo-shoots showing the young couple. These images were a major shift away from the very stately and distant behaviour of his father, Kim Jong-il, and are an aim to appeal to younger Koreans yearning for

change. The first few months were carefully orchestrated to show an image of control, momentum, credibility and the laying of a foundation for the future with propaganda around building a “prosperous country”. On April 11, 2012 the Worker’s Party declared Kim Jong-un as the “supreme leader” and established him at the pinnacle of the party, military and state leadership. This inevitable elevation to the top post was done at a speed that analysts in the region said reflected the insecurity of the young leader’s status and was done by the secretive leadership to present a solid power centre to manage the anxieties of the population.

There are many examples of heads of organisations coming into what is often described as a strong culture, who try to make substantial changes and have to leave shortly afterwards either through disillusionment or a rebellion from the staff, such as Carly Fiorina at HP, John Hood at Oxford University and more recently John Maeda at Rhode Island School of Design. The latter is of direct interest in that Maeda was employed to take a traditional “analog” school and “make” it “digital”. He was going to do this by “reinventing leadership”, the title of his new book, and using social media to develop community, generate a sense of purpose and instigate change. In March 2011 82% of the faculty posted a vote of “no confidence” in his leadership and opposed all of the changes proposed. In an open email to all staff, Maeda announced that he was committed to the change for various business reasons (decline in applications, decline in fundraising, decline in alumni engagement) and that he would change by having more “pizza and beer” sessions for face-to-face engagement. Maeda is still President, but there have been significant changes to other senior personnel.

Enter the new Vice Chancellor

Expectations were high. FF had provided a steady hand in the growth of the University. He was not hugely ambitious; in fact, he prided himself by placing the University right in the middle of the “table”. The University had been in a hiatus since FF had announced his retirement and the appointment of the new Vice Chancellor. I had to miss the first few days of the new Vice Chancellor’s tenure. I had an interview in the States for a position at a world-class university. I had thought it wise to let the incoming VC know the details of why I was not present to ensure that she did not think I was not willing to work hard. It was a risky plan but I considered that honesty

was the best way forward. She had sounded impressed, told me I had to go for the opportunity but hoped I didn't get it.

In the interview for the Vice Chancellor's position VC2 had been the only female finalist. She was Australian but had worked as Dean of Faculty at a university in London. She had extensive international experience, having been the wife of an Australian ambassador to Pakistan, Nigeria and Mexico, among others. She had convinced the Board of Governors that YY University was an underperforming institute and that survival would depend on getting in international students (we currently have the lowest proportion of international students in the country) and a greater focus on postgraduate study. From the perspective of the five Deans of School, this is what we had been articulating and strategically working on for the last few years, and – to be fair to FF – this was a direction that he too had been coming to. VC2 had also said that she wanted the University to be “academically led”. We were not entirely sure what this actually meant, but it could only be good...

My first day back from the States I went to my first Policy Advisory Group (PAG) meeting (renamed from the Senior Management Team), having missed just the one. The Head of Estates, CC, sucked in air through her teeth and said that it had been noted that I was absent. There was a shaking of the head and the indication that I needed to ‘perform’. At the meeting, the three most senior people were unusually silent and CC did a lot of the talking and agenda setting. We had just been committed to a £40 million building project on campus for a new digital arts building. The outgoing VC had signed the contract in his last week. CC gave the impression that she was building the future of the University and that only she could have got us to this position. In the next Vice Chancellor's Group meeting, now renamed VCEG (Executive being added to signal a change) it was once again clear that CC was positioning herself as the deputy to the VC. The Deputy Vice Chancellors were once again quiet, like chastened schoolboys. In my regular meeting with DVCA, my line manager, I asked what had happened in such a short time – I had only missed three days! DVCA said that there had been a lot of tension with DVCF, Deputy Vice Chancellor (Resources) who had opposed her appointment. In fact VC2 would take many opportunities to pointedly correct DVCF publicly, which would result in a shared moment of shame among the others present. DVCF had always been a bit of a

bully when it came to some issues, but we all started to develop some sympathy for him during these moments of public put downs.

The first six weeks were taken up with back-to-back meetings. The VC had decided that she wanted me in most of them – to punish me, according to CC – but for whatever reason I spent the majority of my time in meetings at the main campus. In addition to the meetings, the Deans of School were asked to present their strategic plans that would demonstrate that we were all aligned. The VC started to develop a vision statement for the University. She favoured the branding work that had been already done and decided it would form the basis of the direction and focus for the University for the next three years (we are required to do three year planning cycles). In an attempt to present a more collaborative style the VC had asked all members of PAG to write their visions and submit them to her. The VC consequently ended up with nearly 50 pages of information from which to extract a coherent, all encompassing vision statement to inform the strategy.

VCEG meetings were scheduled every Monday. On the Sunday she sent around the first draft pulling things together for comment by VCEG members. Diligently I read it the night before and made some notes: it was so broad that it ended up losing any sense of direction, yes it referred to all aspects of activity in the University, but it was all so complicated that it ended up losing any coherence and impact. It was also ten pages long – far too many for people to read and engage with. In my experience I have found vision statements to be largely a tick box exercise, but from a branding perspective, if a vision statement ends up creating mantra for staff that directs action, then it is of use – it's not what a vision statement is, it's what a vision statement does. The meeting opened with CC saying that it was a great summary of what we do, but then DVCA started to say that it tried to do too many things – yes we were good at teacher training, but if the aim was to be an international university that was academically led i.e. with more research, then teacher training would not be a headline. Bearing in mind this exercise was for 2012 to 2015, yes it could be aspirational for teacher training and could certainly guide investment and resourcing strategies, but by adding in all of the school areas was not helpful. VC2 said that she had originally not included it but on conversation with the Head of School and some of his staff had decided to put it in. Very quickly she stated: “let's take it out” and

with a flourish of the pen “okay, it’s out”. I added that the branding project had worked hard to shorten the vision statement to ‘the study of creativity, culture and enterprise’ and she latched on to this as being tight but open enough for all schools to engage with and we should adopt this statement – decision made. That is, until the next meeting when the next iteration of the vision statement was circulated to VCEG for comment. The statement was now down to five pages but other aspects had crept back in. Education studies had now replaced teacher training, there was now mention of all the individual schools again – although the VC had been stating that she would be restructuring before the end of the year. The vision went through another eight iterations in the same way with the VC making the final judgment calls as to what should be included and what should be omitted based on who she had spoken to last. Version nine was sent to the Board of Governors for comment and immediately came back with a note that said it was rambling, all over the place, too long, lacked ambition and focus although the aspirations were right. A five bullet point version was presented back by one of the Governors – essentially the key points of ‘creativity, culture and enterprise’ with an addition of global citizenship and environmental issues. International had been one of VC’s key proposals to the University in her interview and the focus had been lost a bit in the larger document.

We were all a bit tired and frustrated by the process at this stage, but had decided that it was just the initial settling in period and a way for VC2 to get to know the place, to be collaborative and to ensure that we all recognised that things were completely different from the previous regime. There were some really good unintended consequences that came from it – the Deputy Vice Chancellors, often at odds with each other, started to meet for fifteen minutes after each VCEG to compare notes. They had quickly noted that VC2 would say one thing to one and another to another, changing her mind frequently. A lot of the guidance we were getting was conflictual, for example that we should develop very high-end postgraduate programmes aimed at the overseas market (£20,000 plus) while widening participation allowing low-income students to take part but with no financial aid. We were also all hoping that this relentless meeting culture would calm down and we would settle into a more balanced and productive way of working.

Leadership and strategy

I had been involved in the interviews for the new Vice Chancellor and we had all been impressed by VC2's presentation and her rhetoric around an 'academically-led' institution. This was seen as a contrast to FF who would constantly remind us that he was not an academic and promised that academic issues would be the future drivers for strategy and investment, rather than the perceived financial ones. I am reminded of my start at the School three years ago and the rhetoric that I had used with my faculty and staff as I came in to the school wanting to instigate change. Some of this change was perceived by me coming in, and no doubt linked to my own self-esteem, ego, ambitions and aspirations, and some of it was from me coming in and getting a sense of place. I had consciously taken my time to get to know the place, the people working there and to try and get a sense of habitus. Unfortunately I had to very quickly make some significant redundancies and so a lot of the path was established by this rather large act. In terms of VC2 coming in, for all intent and purposes the University had £40 million in the bank, and a building project started and it needed a clear steer to navigate the significant changes that were going on with the UK funding model. Very soon it became clear that VC2 did not have a crystal ball, was not imbued with superhuman powers and had started to focus on the day-to-day management of the place.

VC2 would also think out loud, externalising her thoughts as if working through them when they were spoken. At one stage, after a long diatribe, she stopped, paused and said: "this is where my children tell me that I've shared too much". Part of the problem is that for a person in a powerful position, this airing of unformed thoughts causes a lot of anxieties in the people they have to work with. Quite often it was unclear when a decision was made or when it was just in a state of preparation and external dialogue. Some of the statements could be trivial and almost comical, but others could have major significance for individuals, for example "we should just close down biology". Over the first three months we were all prepared to go along with this new way of working. Under FF we had had such a hierarchical structure that the thought of questioning or arguing back had not really occurred to us.

Reflecting on the narrative there are a number of themes that come to mind. The most obvious one is that this is a classic scenario of a group of senior management planning their strategy when a new chief executive comes in to the group. In the dominant discourse, strategy as ‘position’ has been the predominant conceptual framework with Michael Porter’s *Competitive Strategy* the landmark summary of how to reinterpret the microeconomics of the industrial organisation in a managerial context. Porter’s follow up book *Competitive Advantage* developed his dominant thinking of a ‘resource based view’ of the firm [Porter (1985), Wenerfelt (1984) and systems thinking versions exemplified by Beer (1975, 1985) and Warren (2002)]. These well established models of strategy development take a technocratic approach to the engagement of people as part of the process, assuming a rational, logical and linear model of analysis and planning. Built on the seminal works by Chandler (1962) Andrews (1971) and Porter (1980; 1985), later developed in to cybernetic models of strategy planning and resource management, these approaches do not take in to account the dynamics of what is actually happening between people as the process develops. These models often acknowledge the writing of Sun Tzu in *The Art of War*. Although there are a series of maxims in Sun Tzu’s text, the key approach is to acknowledge that processes are non-linear, unpredictable and paradoxical. Mintzberg developed these observations further in arguing that strategy development was a ‘craft’ and that the process was better characterised as an emergent process rather than a planned organisational phenomenon. Mintzberg (1989) emphasises the recursive nature and the processes of negotiation and adaptation that take place.

Recent years have seen growing expectations of leaders and of leadership as a distinct activity and role, separated and elevated from management. Leadership is often presented as a magico-mythical activity that is “possessed” by an individual and then performed for the organisation. It is often located within the individual and is separated from the context. The dominant literature is both prolific and contradictory, presenting the traits of a good leader, the emotional intelligence of a good leader or the habits of a good leader. Pfeffer & Sutton (2006), Griffin (2002) and Mowles (2011) present an alternative viewpoint that put leadership activity back in to the social domain and contextualises it as an activity that we do together. Pfeffer & Sutton claim that leaders are both in control and not in control at the same time,

maintaining the complexity of the situation and the paradoxes in which we operate. The dominant tendency is to simplify these dualities in to a vision of a leader:

‘So a leader would be someone who could choose to be transformational, turn things to the positive, decide on change, and show themselves to be a leader rather than a manager. In being able to sew these things together they will have set out their vision in a coherent and morally convincing, authentic way that demonstrates how they will both inspire and deliver results.’ [Mowles (2011): p 92]

Mowles goes on to argue that it is this dominant way of thinking that drives our perceptions of what a leader does, and hence how we advertise for leaders, and how we go through the Human Resource processes of engaging a leader. VC2 presented extremely well in her interview, ticking all of the boxes around visionary change for the institution, presenting a compelling narrative that we all bought in to.

The expectations are high. We expect our leaders to be transformational rather than transactional, that they will favour change rather than continuity. We expect them to reduce complexity to a single unifying vision, which tends to lead to idealisations of both the process and the person. VC2 has also arrived at the University with a “momentum game”, aiming to hit the ground running, and we have inevitably idealised both her and the process. But in this process of change that we idealised we are starting to see some minor and major challenges to identity, both for the organisation and ourselves.

At a general level, the processes that took place when I arrived in the School of Art & Design as the new head are essentially the same as the processes that are taking place with a new Vice Chancellor coming in to the organisation. We both made statements about what a “gem” the place was, how we were “hiding our light under a bushel”, how we needed to be more international in our outlook, how we needed more postgraduate teaching and hence research informing that teaching. We both arrived with huge expectations, both of us and by us. We both embarked on ‘strategy’ sessions to try to get some cohesion around a common purpose, we engaged people in more or less the same ways – yet the way things have unfolded have been profoundly

different, and yet business continues more or less as we planned. But there are some significant dynamics worth paying attention to as “who we are” is starting to change from the interactions around strategy and the way that we find ourselves working together to achieve these aims.

Critical theory provides another way of looking at the process of strategic management. According to Alvesson & Willmott:

‘Critical Theory provides a (not the) *critical-constructive* intellectual counterpoint to mainstream management studies. ... The principal strength of Critical Theory resides in its breadth, which offers an inspiration for critical reflection on a large number of central issues in management studies: notions of rationality and progress, technocracy and social engineering, autonomy and control, communicative action, power and ideology, as well as fundamental issues of epistemology.’ [Alvesson & Willmott (2003): p 2]

Critical Theory has been developed in to Critical Management Studies (CMS) with the aim of trying to take a broader critical of management that is both inclusive and pluralistic. However there still appears to be a spectator element to the research being undertaken, with a focus on the “we” identities.

‘From a complex responsive process perspective, *an organisation is evolving identity*. In talking about organisations, the normal practice is to focus almost exclusively on the collective or ‘we’ identities. The complex responsive process perspective, however, encourages us not to lose sight of the fact that ‘I’ identities are inseparable from ‘we’ identities’ [Stacey (2005): p 435]

For Stacey strategy and identity are inextricably linked. He says that strategy is ‘the evolving narrative pattern of organisational identity. It is the evolving pattern of what an organisation is.’ [Stacey (2005): p 435]. Taking a complex responsive process view of these patterns requires attention to not only what is going on between us, but also what is going on for me in the process and how I am being formed by the process and also forming the patterns.

Elias also takes a complex view of these patterns of interrelating. The concept of figuration is central to his work. By figuration, Elias refers to the complex network of social interdependencies that surround everyday life. These interdependencies reflect the ‘underlying regularities by which people in certain society are bound over and over again to particular patterns of conduct and very specific functional chains.’ [Elias (1994a): p 489]. Elias stresses that particular figurations are not fixed since power relations are rarely those of total dominance but reflect the changing balances between individuals and groups. Elias sees power as relational, as a ‘game’ of interdependencies where ‘the participants always have control *over each other*.’ [Elias (1970): p 81]. As Elias puts it, any outcome represents the ‘interweaving of countless individual interests and intentions’ [Elias (1994a): p 389]. As a consequence, it is difficult for any one individual or group to ‘determine history’ since their intentions and actions are always likely to be moderated by others on whom they are dependent. Apparent social order in our world is not planned or intended. This means that for strategists there is unlikely to be any simple relation between a particular ‘strategy’ and a particular ‘outcome’ because any particular strategy is likely to moderate, deviate or mutate as it is interwoven within the actions of a host of different players. Any order that results from such interweaving is therefore likely to be as much unintended as intended. An Eliasian perspective therefore supports Mintzberg’s argument that ‘emergent strategy means, literally, unintended order’ [Mintzberg (1990): p 152]. As Elias argues, ‘something comes into being that was planned and intended by none of these individuals, yet has emerged nevertheless from their intentions and actions’ [Elias (1994a): p 389]. Any individual or group is therefore situated in a plethora of networks and chains and their feelings and actions cannot be understood outside these complex interdependencies.

In one-on-one conversations with VC2 she is quick to point out that she is a professor of philosophy and takes a completely rational view of the world. Elias presented the notion of *Homo clausus* – he argued that a characteristic of modernity was that people often remained unaware of the complex interdependencies in which they are situated. It was apparent that C. did not see that a number of things she was asking us to address were conflictual, fairly arbitrary and in some cases, quite random. In her dealings with us she had already stereotyped the individuals into specific behaviours and expectations. It has been surprising how quick a process this has been, and how

much frustration this has caused for the established members of the University – especially the long serving members. Elias argues that *Homo clausus* represents a common, yet limiting, assumption of much of the social sciences and appears to be a common basis for management. Against this view he argues for the recognition that people are *Homines aperti*, ie open. This represents a vision of ‘people in the plural; we obviously need to start out with the image of a multitude of people, each of them relatively open, interdependent processes’ [Elias (1970): p 121]. I have tried to have these conversations with VC2 and found her to be interested academically but she cannot see how they apply to management and what is going on between us.

In promoting *Homines aperti*, Elias was concerned to show that we can only understand ourselves if we see how power relations reflect a complex interweaving of interdependencies amongst people, a ‘networked agency’. In understanding power and human agency, the focus is necessarily therefore on *interdependencies* and networks, rather than the decisions and actions of individual ‘sovereign’ actors. With the concept of *Homines aperti*, we cannot confine ourselves to looking only at the ‘inside’ of an organisation, by the same notion we have *Organisation clausus* (or the idea of organisations as bounded and autonomous entities).

Elias refused to accept the reality of a sharp distinction between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ organisations. Instead, his analyses cross the boundary of organisations. For me personally I was in the process of detachment from the University as I was seriously considering moving overseas to another institution. So there was a lot going on ‘outside’ the organisation that, despite my best efforts, I am sure was affecting my engagement in the discourses. Home life was pretty good, but we had just bought a house and we were still in the process of coming to terms with all of our savings going in to property, leaving us with a very shallow safety net should things go wrong. The importance of work was therefore heightened and, looking back, I was probably in survival mode, looking out for signs that I had a place in the new order at work. This certainly could mean that I was over sensitive to criticism. Having immersed myself in critical analysis and going through the process of writing about organisational life I was constantly paying attention to what it was that I was doing and what was going on around me. I made sure that I spoke to my peers and

colleagues frequently to see if we all were making similar sense of things – and broadly, certainly at dean level, we were all feeling very much the same: anxious.

Strategy and identity

We have already argued for a pluralistic view of identity, including self-identity characterised as the theory of ourselves. This includes notions of where we think we fit in within society as a human being and is dependent on the context in which we present ourselves. The core of social identity theory [Tajfel (1974)] is that social categorisation influences people's perception of others and oneself. Typically we characterise ourselves based on structural features of a group membership, perceptions of the generalised other, with a view that identity illustrates our desire and need to see ourselves as a part of something. When social identity is salient, groups and oneself are perceived in terms of stereotypes and prototypes. VC2 has already made reference to "Poms", "rural", "male" as examples of stereotyping the groups. We have a natural desire to belong to a group [Aaltio (2004), Barney et al (1998), Bernstein (1986), Houtsonen (1996), Huotelin (1992)]. As we started to develop social identity theory in the context of organisational life, the notion of organisational identity started to emerge as an important phenomenon in which we categorise ourselves in relation to others, but simultaneously create team spirit between individuals in interactions with each other [Erickson (1964)]. This is particularly the case in a university that has a wide range of subjects, disciplines and practices. In a university we also have the diversity of roles from academic, researcher, teacher, technician, administrator, manager, senior manager etc that leads to multiple identities rather than one core identity, further challenging the notion of the organisational identity. The formation of multiple identities may consequently be perceived as a weakening of the organisation's identity, where identity strength is defined as the extent to which organisational members share a collective perception of the organisation's identity [Labianca, Fairbank, Gioia & Umphress (2001)]. It has long been agreed that organisational identity and organisational identification are important influences on the effectiveness of organisations and their members. Organisational identity may provide organisations with competitive advantage [Barney et al (1998)] and guide and direct actions of members in response to issues facing the organisation [Dutton & Dukerich (1991)]. Organisational identification has been seen as an

important aspect in encouraging positive and desirable outcomes such as trust, personal and job related cooperation and citizenship [Bartel (2001); Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail (1994); Scott & Lane (2000)].

Much of the dominant literature on organisational identity is based on the definition presented by Albert & Whetten (1985). They suggest that organisational identity is core, enduring and distinct about organisations, and as such is about the essential features of an organisation [Gioia (1998)] and is often described as organisational members' perspectives or insiders' views of what the organisation is like or is about [Dutton & Dukerich (1991)]. Hence the dominant view is that organisational identity is a socially constructed, shared belief of the core characteristics or the essence of an organisation [Ashforth & Mael (1989); Corley (2004)].

The dominant thinking in branding is based on the same premise [Aaker (2001); Olins (2004)]. Albert & Whetten suggested that organisation identity consists of those attributes that members feel are fundamental to the organisation, uniquely descriptive of it and persisting within it over time. Albert & Whetten see organisational identity as a property of a collective [Albert & Whetten (1985)]. I am not sure if Albert & Whetten saw organisational identity as this reified 'thing' that the organisation owns, but the term seems to have been taken up by marketing as an indication of the unique selling point of the organisation and fundamental to the "brand". It must therefore be preserved.

This is also echoed in the human resources literature as something that can then be 'handed on' to newcomers and something that should form a key part of the induction process. It is seen as an ingrained "property" of the collective that is continuously negotiated and gives meanings to individual members [Scott & Lane (2000); Fiol (2001)]. The concept of organisational identification in social identity theory is grounded in the major components of categorisation, identification and comparison [Tajfel & Turner (1979)]. The thinking is that organisational identification keeps organisational members aware of the organisation's need for survival.

The dilemma is that a strong, unified organisational identity may lead to enhanced organisational performance, and competitive advantage [Barney et al (1998)], but that

it may also be an impediment to organisational performance in that it may be too constraining during periods of deliberate change. Organisations with a homogenous workforce, and hence a stronger organisational identity, will likely face a greater resistance to change as they will be highly motivated to preserve and maintain their organisational identity [Brown & Starkey (2000); Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail (1994)].

This viewpoint of an organisation struggling to make sense of identity makes a number of simplifications that gloss over the fact that we are constantly grappling with processes of identification, that change is always happening and that there are shifting power dynamics in every discourse. Elias and Bourdieu refer to the notion of habitus that enables and constrains the relationships working together. In terms of developing the organisational vision and identity, VC2 has followed the process as described by the dominant discourse. She has engaged the members of the organisation to articulate what is core to “us” with the aim of extracting our “essence”.

Jürgen Habermas presented the idea of communicative action in which actors in society seek to reach common understanding and to coordinate actions by reasoned argument, consensus, and cooperation rather than strategic action in pursuit of their own goals [Habermas (1984): p 86]. He provides a theoretical basis for a view of planning that emphasises widespread participation, sharing of information with the public, reaching consensus through public dialogue rather than the exercise of power, avoiding privileging of experts and bureaucrats, and replacing the model of the technical expert with one of the reflective practitioner [Argyris & Schon (1983); Innes (1995); Lauria & Soll (1996)]. Habermas builds on the work of Weber, Mead, Durkheim, Marx and Parsons to develop his theory of communicative action. He distinguishes four kinds of action by individuals in society: teleological action, with strategic action as a subset; normatively regulated action; dramaturgical action; and communicative action [Habermas (1984): p 85]. In the latter, two or more actors establish a relationship and ‘seek to reach an understanding about the action situation and their plans of action in order to coordinate their actions by way of agreement. The central concept of *interpretation* refers in the first instance to negotiating definitions of the situation which admit of consensus...’ [Habermas (1984): p 86]. Habermas

stresses the importance of language and democracy in his ‘model’. He also refers to the notion of the “lifeworld” based on Husserl’s work:

‘Subjects acting communicatively always come to an understanding in the horizon of a lifeworld ... formed from more or less diffuse, always unproblematic, background convictions [it] serves as a source of situation definitions that are presupposed by participants as unproblematic The lifeworld also stores the interpretive work of preceding generations.’

[Habermas (1984): p 70]

A vital argument for Habermas is that in the course of history the lifeworld must be “rationalised”. Rationalisation is part of social evolution and necessary for an emancipated society [Habermas (1984): p 74]. These background convictions have been built on generations of society interactions and world views and govern how we see the world and consequently behave in it. They are the ritual practices that we follow and, according to Habermas, can only be changed through communicative action. Habermas writes a lot about “civil society” by which he means a society beyond the sphere of the state and the economy, for example churches, cultural associations, gender, groups of concerned citizens, political parties and labour unions [Habermas (1992a; p 453]. To be a member of a pluralist democracy one must behave as a civil citizen. Habermas takes a rational view of, society:

‘The communicative rationality recalls older ideas of logos, inasmuch as it brings along with it the connotations of a noncoercively unifying, consensus-building force of a discourse in which the participants overcome their first subjectively based views in favor of a rationally motivated agreement.’

[Habermas (1987): p 294]

Referring to Richard Rorty (1967 and 1979), Habermas agrees with the typical postmodernist position that a philosophical world view has become untenable and that there can no longer be a totalising knowledge. However this does not imply that a “theory of rationality” could not be universal. For Habermas ‘[c]ommunicative reason is directly implicated in social life processes insofar as acts of mutual understanding take on the role of a mechanism for coordinating action’ [Habermas (1983): p 316]. It

therefore exists in everyday life and for Habermas human beings are defined as democratic beings.

The process of developing the vision and strategy could be seen as following this process of communicative reason. We were all asked to take part in the discourse and there were constant iterations until we arrived at an agreed document. The problem is that during the process there were a number of power dynamics playing out between members, the gossip and rumour machine went in to overdrive, and certainly privately, the process was not seen as democratic but as a ‘compromise’ with no one particularly satisfied with the outcome. However, as a platform for dialogue, the vision statement and strategy document did provide a focus for conversations, and did allow for interactions around the topic, even if a shared meaning was made in the hidden transcripts. According to Habermas, in society the role of the citizen is to take part in the public debate. ‘Participation is seen as *discursive* participation. And participation is *detached* participation.’ [Flyvberg (1998): p 213]. The process we went through was anything but detached; people were physically and emotionally engaged – in my time at the university, I would say that under F.’s leadership I had never seen such engagement. From a Habermas perspective, power plays out through law and sovereignty, and certainly the process was played out because of the position of Vice Chancellor, but there were significant other power dynamics at play. This is where the thinking of Foucault makes more sense in terms of the power relations playing out. Habermas presents an ideal process for communicative action. Habermas does acknowledge this by presenting the barriers to the process actually following this rational path, and states that consensus seeking and freedom from domination are universally inherent forces in human conversation. This idealistic viewpoint puts a lot of faith in humanity – there are many thinkers who state the exact opposite, Machiavelli (1983) for example:

‘...that in constituting and legislating for a commonwealth it must be taken for granted that all men are wicked and that they will always give vent to the malignity that is in their minds when opportunity offers.’ [Machiavelli (1983): p 111]

Assuming evil away, as Habermas seems to do, does not mean that it is not there. Nor does assuming that everything is evil help in understanding what is going on around us. 'The lesson is that the first step to becoming moral is realising that we are not.' [Flyvberg (1998): p 217]. In real civil society it is these conflicts that are of interest and that add the richness and diversity to the way that we work and what we end up doing.

In contrast to Habermas, Foucault and others claim that communication is always laden with power. Communication is messy and 'power is always present' [Foucault (1998): p11]. Humans are infinitely more complex than Habermas's *homo democraticus*. There also comes a time when someone has to make a decision – in the consensus-building process that took place, it still required C. to make some decisions, to use her sovereign power. 'Any society must have some procedures for dealing with conflicts that cannot be resolved by argumentation – even when all parties are committed to rational argumentation.' [Bernstein (1992): p 221].

It's not just a conversation

Power has been an area of study by many philosophers and academics with the dominant discourse seeing power as a 'thing' that we have and that is wielded. Foucault has been hugely influential in providing an understanding of power that is different from the notion of discrete structure with the idea that 'power is everywhere' diffused and embodied in discourse, knowledge and 'regimes of truth' [Foucault (1991)]. Power for Foucault is what makes us what we are, and is inextricably linked to identity:

'His work marks a radical departure from previous modes of conceiving power and cannot be easily integrated with previous ideas, as power is diffuse rather than concentrated, embodied and enacted rather than possessed, discursive rather than purely coercive, and constitutes agents rather than being deployed by them.' [Gaventa (2003): p 1]

Foucault challenges the idea that power is wielded by people or groups by way of 'episodic' or 'sovereign' acts of domination or coercion, seeing it instead as dispersed

and pervasive. In the first few meetings in the University, the power dynamics between the individuals as they positioned themselves in the light of new administration were much more heightened as we struggled to find out where we belonged in the scheme of things. The Vice Chancellor would frequently use language and public put downs to not only demonstrate her seniority but also to manage some of her own anxieties coming in to a group of established people, some of whom had been there for twenty years plus. On more than one occasion she had confided in me that she was a little bit frightened coming in to the post. She has no experience at this level and comes from only about five years at dean level in large organisations, however she has consistently been promoting global education for many years in Australia and has written and researched internationalised education models, so this was a familiar place for her. A lot of the put downs and comments in senior management meetings could be seen as an anxious positioning of herself and the establishment of a hierarchy – highlighting an asymmetrical power distribution. This has been further emphasised by the establishment of a new post in the University, Executive Officer to the Vice Chancellor, and the appointment of the Vice Chancellor's previous personal assistant to the position at a salary not previously seen at the University. The narrative has been around "this is the way it is done in London", once again bringing to attention the subordinate nature of the rest of us. In addition to the Executive Officer there is also a Personal Assistant to the Vice Chancellor. With this group of 'henchmen' established by the Vice Chancellor there are now at least two people chasing up on projects and making sure that initiatives are being followed up. It also reinforces the power hierarchy in the organisation.

The Head of Estates is an administrative job that finds the person predominantly at their desk from early morning to the close of play. CC has used this time, proximity of her office and the opportunity to have quiet time with the core Vice Chancellor's office to make sure that she is there constantly and aware of what is going on and influencing as much as she can. In the more structured meetings it is clear that there is a private transcript between the Vice Chancellor, the Executive Assistant and the Head of Estates. Constant reference is made to private conversations that have taken place between them further emphasising the growing hegemony in the group and the asymmetric power relations.

Taking up Foucault, disciplinary power rather than sovereign power is of huge significance. The central administration still has much power but it is limited if only because power in its 'sovereign' form is experienced today as restriction and oppression. In an academic establishment where people are encouraged to challenge and to critique, this is further seen as a curb to academic freedom. VC2 seems to be aware of this and constantly exerts her sovereign power through her key administrators but it is the disciplinary power of social control that is of greater, everyday interest. Foucault argues that in corporations a kind of sovereign power exists that can be described as parallel in character to that of a state, but attention to this can be misleading, and can often conceal the power relations and their subtle deployment. Foucault's conception of disciplinary power allows a description of the enabling as well as constraining constitutive capacity identified as power. Disciplinary power is in every perception, every judgment, and every act. Like Foucault, Elias was concerned with how we come to learn social discipline. Following his focus on figurations, he saw such discipline as a consequence of the interdependency networks in which we are situated, and the development of these networks over time. In these detailed historical studies, Elias illustrates how interdependency and subjectivity are interwoven, particularly as they relate to our emotions and to what he termed self-constraint or restraint. However, as van Krieken notes, the term 'social discipline' may be more appropriate since Elias was concerned with the 'positive, productive aspects of the effects of social figurations on human habitus' [van Krieken (1998): p 133]. Elias emphasised the asymmetry in power relations and noted how this ebbs and flows.

There is strong similarity between Elias and Foucault, both are against the notion of *Homo clausus*, both use similar philosophical reference points such as Socrates and Kant, and stress the transformation of selfhood, bodily functions, human feelings etc in the course of Western history. Yet in relation to organisational theory, there are also notable contrasts between an Eliasian and Foucauldian perspective. A principal difference is that the former places the analysis of knowledge within the social, whereas the latter tends to treat the study of the social largely as an aspect of discourse. The latter position creates problems since it restricts the theoretical room in which to analyse how discursive practices are treated socially – ie how people manoeuvre in relation to discursive practices, how they play with them, resist them,

circumvent them etc [Newton (1999)(2001)]. The Foucauldian concern with the ‘production of the self’ explains how images of the self are produced within discursive practices, but it doesn’t necessarily explain how the self manages such images. Explaining such forms of resignation or resistance *within the workplace* remains problematic without an account of the self, which explains how people agentially manoeuvre in relation to discourse [Newton (1996b)(1998b)]. The problem is that explaining how the self relates to discourse requires sensitivity to the ways in which discourse is ‘established’ within the social. As Elias put it, ‘actions and ideas cannot be explained and understood if they are considered on their own; they need to be understood and explained within the framework of [figurations].’ [Elias (1970): p 96].

VC2 has been married to her husband for more than 30 years and followed him around the world in his role as ambassador. While talking to her socially about that life she glowed in the privileged way that she lived – chauffeured everywhere, garden parties, servants – and she would fly back to Australia to do her teaching blocks. She had spent much of the time writing and thinking, and it was only in recent years, since he had retired, that she had joined organisational life as a manager. A lot of her management ideas are theoretical and idealised – very much based on academic readings and a rational view of the world. She is highly intelligent, but surprisingly not that socialised. She talks to think and then is surprised when people hang on her words and then frustrated as she goes full circle. Six months in to her tenure people have started to wait before reacting to her comments, we have started to triangulate the instructions with other people to ensure that they are the most current, correct or a “VC2-ism” – we are starting to develop new ways of working together that help us make our way in organisational life, help reduce anxiety and also to ensure that work is done.

Thinking out loud

It strikes me that VC2 uses language and rhetoric in particular as a form of sensemaking, at one level trying to make sense of us, the people she works with, trying to make sense of her own thoughts and aspirations and also make sense of the macro environment we find ourselves in. With FF this rhetoric had been mostly silent

or limited to a select few and only really manifested in clear action statements.

An example of this is when it came to the presentations to the Board of Governors. VC2 initially decided that she wanted the five Deans of School, the Head of Research and the Head of International to make Powerpoint presentations of ten minutes duration followed by five minute question time. We all protested that this would be “death by PowerPoint” but VC2 was adamant. She also said that she needed us to be professional and slick and so we would be rehearsing until she was satisfied with our performances – another indication of the power structures. At the first dress rehearsal it was clear that it was indeed death by PowerPoint and so it was decided that the Deans would give a ten-minute talk followed by five minutes of questions without any visual aids. We discussed this and said that this could also be dull as we had all been given a template to talk to and would all essentially be saying the same things. VC2 changed her mind on the spot and said that we would do ‘speed dating’ in which the room would be set up in cabaret style seating and the Deans would all simultaneously do ten minute presentations to the table, VC2 would blow a whistle and the Deans would then stand up and move to the next table. While talking out loud, VC2 changed her mind again and said that what would happen is that the Deans would remain seated and the Governors would move around on each whistle blow: “this means, Pradeep, that you can have some props on your table like a ceramic bowl and a painting”. There was a silence that felt like it went on for minutes, but I am sure it was only a matter of seconds. Trying to recover the situation I suggested that perhaps it would be easier for just the one person to move rather than a group of people. I think that VC2 took this as an endorsement of the idea and ordered that this is what we would do. The Deans were then tasked to go away and prepare for a dress rehearsal the following week. Although there was an exercising of power and processes of power relations shifting, this process of thinking out loud and constant change, although what a good, authentic leader should do, is also undermining in terms of credibility, trust and anxiety. As we collectively make sense of what is going on, the process of relating is revealing.

As Weick says, ‘[s]ensemaking begins with a sensemaker. How can I know what I think until I see what I say?’” [Weick (1995): p18]. He goes on to say that this is a trap and that the *sensemaker* is singular but that no individual ever acts like single

sensemaker. ‘Instead, any one sensemaker is, in Mead’s words, “a parliament of selves.”’ [Weick (1995): p18]. The identity of the group is starting to emerge in the way that we are starting to envisage and fantasise about the future. The rhetoric that is being presented, the image of what it will be like working together, has left quite a few people anxious and nervous about their role as we move ahead, so much so that one of the Deputy Vice Chancellors has opted to take early retirement, and one of the Deans of School has also decided to retire. Four months in to the tenure, we are predicting that there will be a further three senior retirements before the summer is over.

The University has plenty of money in the bank and continues to make a significant surplus each year. The challenges facing us are to do with major changes to do with industry regulations and the funding regime. Rather than trying to get a feel for the people in the organisation, the strengths and weaknesses of our networks and interactions, VC2 came in with a distinctive mental model based around rational choice theory, that she would ‘do the strategy to us’. Although there was the façade of engagement and collaboration, the reality is that we have to fit in to the strategy, which is often contradictory, flip-flopping and out of context. None of us have spoken out loudly about this yet. Under FF we quietly reacted to the lack of ambition and the steady hand by talking in corridors and waiting for him to move on. Now that he has been replaced we have someone that is the polar opposite: not steady but hugely ambitious; appears to be open but often has a fixed viewpoint; appears approachable but can be very dismissive. There is however little clarity in what it is that we are trying to do. Is it better to be steady and average, or choppy but ambitious, and at what stage does ambition become delusion? The first few months has resulted in an increase in the amount and type of chatter throughout the organisation.

Hidden transcripts

In *Domination and the Arts of Resistance – Hidden Transcripts* James Scott presents a study of the formation of the public transcript and the hidden transcripts of the various actors involved, how they can emerge and how they relate to the each other. Scott is quick to point out that hidden transcripts are particular to a given social site and to a particular group of actors and that the hidden transcript contains not only speech, but

a whole range of practices. The third key element is that the ‘frontier between the public and hidden transcripts is a zone of constant struggle between dominant and subordinate – not a solid wall.’ [Scott (1990): p 14]. To make sense of this power relationship, Scott argues that we need to ‘first understand how the public transcript is constructed, how it is maintained and the purposes it serves.’ [Scott (1990): p17] This includes trying to make sense of the public performances of deference and loyalty, of symbolic display and the audience. The public narrative is seen as a “self-portrait” of dominant elites.

VC2’s initial plans for the University to offer a liberal arts model have become a telling rhetoric: liberal arts is articulated as being about a breadth of knowledge and hence a statement of intellectual positioning away from a narrow domain. Combined with the various comments that “you are all Poms”, “you’re not in London” and “you are too male” implies that the rest of us are lacking in this breadth of global understanding. Therefore, how can we possibly be against the notion of a liberal arts model for the University? Publicly I am the only one that has spoken out about this – purposely not opposing it but saying that I too get it, but that the liberal arts models are residential and not just about the contact hours in the curriculum. They are significantly helped by the interactions that occur in the halls of residences and outside the timetabled classes. YY University does not have enough residences, let alone appropriate ones for what I would see as a liberal arts model. These conversations initially started out of the gaze of the VC and her executive officer, but as more and more people have started to join in the critique we have started to bring the hidden transcripts in to a more public domain. But this is only a very small hidden transcript in what I am assuming is going on the Deputy Vice Chancellors’ meetings directly after each VC executive group. Once again, this is very much part of the power dynamics at play – those that are in certain hidden transcripts and not in others.

VC2’s on-the-spot changes of the public transcript could also indicate a desire to be part of the subordinate group, or at least listening to the subordinate group to show that she rules on our behalf. This is a very Gramscian view of hegemony. The rhetoric has to have some resonance with the subordinates it aims to influence. The events that took place around the presentation to the Board of Governors are also interesting from a viewpoint of power. By making us rehearse to make sure that we would be

professional and ‘slick’ – and up to her standards – was an indication of the power hierarchy. We had to not only have the public transcript correct, but we also had to meet VC2’s expectations in terms of performance.

At an evening function a few days after the Board of Governors presentation VC2 asked me to give her a lift home. She looked tired and after a long sigh looked at me and said, “What are we doing over here, why aren’t we in the antipodes? We’re too good for this.” I think it was an attempt to make friends. This could have been a show of solidarity, it could have been an indication of wanting support, it could have been a test. I did not really know how to respond so I mumbled something inane about the weather and brushed it off. I had been in previous “relationships” with my bosses that had been both as a friend and as a subordinate and had never really found the boundary situation to work. The power performance would often come in to our personal relationships. I had also found this for myself as a difficult power relationship to manage: one could not ‘run with the hounds and hunt with the hares’; it ended up in some form of compromise. It also highlights that there isn’t ever **one** hidden transcript or **one** public transcript - these are not necessarily singular terms. There is also something key about the theatre of the performance and the expectations that people have from the person in power and the subordinates. Credibility could easily be lost if VC2 was seen to be weak or favouring one person. A convincing performance of authority is required which may mean the suppression or control of feelings that would spoil the performance. There are connections to Weber’s thinking around charisma – it is not just a quality that someone possesses, but is recognized in a relationship in which engaged observers recognise and may even inspire a quality they admire.

Gossip as a power instrument

Elias & Scotson in their 1965 monograph *The Established and the Outsiders* wrote about the power relations and emotional tensions in an English working class community. They tried to develop universal relationships between established members and outsiders trying to explain the dynamics that took place between them and among themselves. The definition of gossip in the English dictionary is generally neutrally presented as ‘informal talk’, although there is often a secondary definition

that is about informal talk that is usually unkind, disapproving or untrue. It is interesting to note that in German (lastern) and Dutch (roddelen) gossip always has pejorative connotations. However, Elias & Scotson distinguished two types of gossip discourse: praise and blame. Praise gossip is positive and intended to strengthen 'internal' ties, whereas blame gossip is negative and aimed at other groups, ie 'outsiders' and delinquents. Elias & Scotson point out that 'bad behaviour' by a minority of the outsiders is portrayed as typical of the whole group, which is therefore considered inferior; whereas 'good behaviour' by a minority of the established is portrayed as typical of the whole group, which is therefore considered superior. Vein Fuchs makes a distinction between informational and moralistic gossip. Informational gossip is the diffusion of fast-breaking news, whereas moralistic gossip is secretive talk about absent people [vein Fuchs (1995)]. Zijderveld (1979) also differentiated between positive and negative gossip, presenting five key characteristics of gossip as mechanisms for social control.

Gluckman (1963) also argued that gossip can help groups hold out and that gossip has three key functions:

- to create group morale through which group norms and values can be established and reinforced;
- to exert social control over newcomers and dissidents;
- to regulate (threatening) conflicts with rival groups.

It is really the latter that is the focus of Elias & Scotson in established-outsider relations. The middle point is one of interest particular interest in this situation as the established try to make sense of how things are changing – and whether they should. I am struck by the changing dynamic of what is happening with the old guard, the recent guard (which includes me) and the newcomers, paralleling the zones in Elias & Scotson. The old guard has been at the university for decades and in some respect reflects the characteristics of the Zone 2 middle class residents – keen on establishing order, holders of heritage and part of the tradition. The gossip here is very much about the old days, about an idealised past. But there is a recent group of people who have been at the university less than five years and who are eager for change – this includes the Head of Estates and the Head of Human Resources. Along with the newcomers in high-ranking positions, this group seems to have formed an identity of its own. The

gossip here has been about the outsiders, the small minority who are seen as representative of 'the others' while also having praise gossip around their own behaviours and work ethic. This is slightly different from what happened at Winston Parva, but there are broad similarities. There is still a process of people accentuating the admirable characteristics of their own group, emphasising their superiority and consequently the unfavourable stereotyping of the outsiders. Marvin & Salazar (1985) refer to this as Auto-stereotyping and Hetero-stereotyping.

Under FF there was greater social control through hierarchy and the following of procedures and rules. In this environment praise gossip is more widespread as group cohesion is strong. In that era, at senior management level, there was equivalence in sex, age, ethnicity and organisational tenure – middle-aged men who had been at the University for many years. Most of the gossip was with the subordinates and VCEG gossip was primarily aimed at the outside world. FF's three cornerstones formed part of the doctrine around which we coalesced (good teaching, popularity of courses and profitability) - simplification of the complex outside world. The new group is significantly different. In conjunction with throw away comments such as "you are all too male" we are starting to see the power relations change from the very male dominated structures and practices that dominated under the previous Vice Chancellor and the more informal structures that are developing under the new Vice Chancellor with added importance from the Head of Estates and the Head of Human Resources – all female. At a very clichéd level this has seen an increased attention to issues of feelings, the colour of the décor, and informal processes of relating. VC2 pays very little attention to hierarchy and organisational structures, seeking advice, consultancy and acknowledgement from anywhere in the organisation. It would be very easy to get into gender politics, but this is not what I really want to bring attention to at this stage, although undoubtedly there is something happening that has something to do with the gender of the senior management team. Focusing superficially on gender risks reifying and dichotomising such concepts as male and female, objectivity and subjectivity, competition and cooperation, and rationality and emotionality. These dichotomies are socially constructed, ambiguous and can lead to a devaluing of the concepts that are generally associated with the feminine. For example, the dichotomy between rationality (generally attributed to males) and emotionality (generally attributed to females) has led to a valorisation of rationality, a tendency to see

rationality as quite separate from emotions. Whereas the previous Vice Chancellor, embodied the rational it was never separate from emotions, although he would often articulate it that way. In the same way VC2 does embody aspects of emotionality but would still demonstrate clear rationality.

Meyer Spacks (1983) and Tannen (1990) pay particular attention to the role of small talk and praise gossip for women. Gossip between women is significantly different to gossip between men. According to Tannen gossip creates shared values in female sub-cultures [Tannen (1990): p102] since social-emotionally gossip supports those who are perceived as minorities. Helgeson (1990) goes further to claim that chatting, small talk and internal social networking through praise gossip is an instrument of female managers and is seen as important to informal organising - or as Elias and Foucault would refer to it: social control.

In reality gossip is much more hybrid than theoretical distinctions can account for. In addition it is also fluid and can transform. But it is an essential part of social life. Mintzberg brought attention to the role of gossip in organisational life referring to it as 'soft' information [Mintzberg (1989)]. In Eliasian thinking, discourse is closely related to power, and so gossip can be an indicator of the power relationships in the group. He observes that senior management use blame gossip during times of organisational conflict and can sometimes get in to situations of a 'front mentality' in which the subordinates are seen as 'the enemy'. VC2 and CC are certainly using this type of social control to indicate that the rest of us are holding the University back and part of the problem.

Over-interpretation also leads to an increase in the gossip as we replay the events to not only make sense of them, but also to protect and position ourselves. Scott states that 'Gossip is perhaps the most familiar and elementary form of disguised popular aggression.... Gossip, almost by definition, has no identifiable author, but scores of eager retailers who can claim that they are just passing on the news.' [Scott (1990): p142]. Scott goes on to say that the 'character of gossip that distinguishes it from rumor is that gossip consists typically of stories that are designed to ruin the reputation of some identifiable person or persons.' [Scott (1990): p142]. Gossip is a discourse about social rules that have been violated. In this particular narrative the

gossip is very much about the change in the way that decisions seem to be being made, how erratic they are and random in their timing and logic – this is very much at odds with what we have been used to, in some cases for a number of decades. The tension in the university is almost palpable with the gossip and conspiracies becoming more common. Scott argues that gossip is also the most democratic of social controls in that it is propagated only to the extent that others find it in their interests to continue telling the story. Gossip is more familiar as a technique of social control among relative equals, but it can also be used as a form of control for sub-ordinates. The asides from VC2, revealing some elements of her private conversations with other people are a way of trying to influence me to perhaps pass on the gossip and undermine the victims. They could also be a way of trying to influence me by giving me the impression that I am taken in to her confidence.

Gossip can be a political tool as it can often disguise the message and/or the messenger, and so as a form of influence can be effective in trying to threaten the hegemony. Rumour is similar to gossip but is not necessarily directed at a particular person and works best when it is of importance to the people's interests. Because it tends to be not about a particular individual we seem to be more liberal in the passing on of rumours and so they tend to propagate through social groups extremely fast. It also changes as it 'travels' through the group being embellished and exaggerated as it is passed on. The embellishments and exaggerations are not random but in line with 'the hopes, fears, and worldview of those who hear it and retell it.' [Scott (1990): p145] The rumours therefore become more representative of the anxieties within the group. Grumbling is often a very common way for subordinates to communicate a general dissatisfaction without taking responsibility for an open complaint.

When VC2 grumbles of her general dissatisfaction I am left wondering about her intent and her role. It is confusing to know what she is expecting me to do – if anything – as often there is little action I can take. At one level it is flattering, but it also undermines the perception of control – the theatre that is needed for me to believe that VC2 is managing not only her anxiety but also the anxiety for the group. In leadership terms, apart from aspects of sensemaking and ambiguity, the ability to understand the anxiety of the group and perhaps hold on to that anxiety that little bit longer is a very important trait. We want our leaders to be the ones that are fearless, or

at least appear fearless, in the face of uncertainty, who provide that aspect of sensibility, who keep their heads. This agreed drama between leaders and followers is important to maintain a sense of order, trust and appropriate levels of anxiety. It feels as if VC2 thrives on anxiety – even in simple situations such as arranging social drinks for the senior management team, the situation gets quickly disorganised with different dates, times, anxiety around whether people are going to come, are we serving the right drinks, is it creating the right impression. The trait of talking out loud to think also brings attention to the anxieties with which VC2 is grappling, often to the discomfort of those around her. We all have moments of anxiety on our jobs, our roles and relationships, but in normal situations we manage to hold on to those anxieties. I am also aware of my tendency to add to gossip and rumour in the organisation. This is sometimes a defensive mechanism to manage my own anxieties, but also a means of control and sometimes to deflect blame. As my own anxieties grow I am sure I fuel some of the conspiracy theories doing the rounds at the university.

When the gossip gets too much, I generally find that I move back to a more familiar place and one in which I am more confident of my position – or am I?

Challenging my own identity

I was starting to feel personally disconnected from my role at the School. Not only was I going through the psychological detachment of a possible move to another institute, the university meeting culture meant that I was spending all of my time at the main campus and not at the School. I noted that in nearly three months I had spent less than four days at the School and I was starting to feel that the plate spinning that one has to do in terms of culture, managing anxieties and maintaining relationships was starting to get out of control. I had not had much time with my School Management Team and they were also starting to comment. To keep up with my paperwork, I was working late into the evening just to keep on top of things. I was still making time to play with the family from 6-9pm but then would get back into work. I was starting to get stressed, something that I was not really used to.

As a School Management Team we decided to book a two-day, overnight session in a local hotel to discuss strategy and how to deal with the imminent five-year review of all our courses. Being acutely aware of the way that I was feeling about VC2 and the anxiety that random thoughts and actions were making me and my peers feel, I wanted to be clear about how best to proceed. As a group we talked about the key points and areas that we wanted to look at; yes it was all complicated and needed to all be addressed, but we kept moving conversations from incredibly tactical, such as deciding the date for the degree show, to completely philosophical about what was art and what was design, what does practice mean. I was asked to prepare an agenda that would allow more structured conversations. That evening I sent around an agenda that I believed addressed the more strategic narratives about what we wanted to say about ourselves and noted that we needed further meetings to talk about operational matters later but needed to get some coherence and shared narratives together so that we could brief the teaching teams about the review. Initially this went down well, but then I was tied up in meetings for a week at the main campus and could feel the anxiety levels in staff, including me, rising about the day-to-day management of the School. The three heads met and decided that they wanted the meeting agenda to focus on operational matters, as that was where we were dropping the ball and so they presented a different agenda, much more focused on issues of timetabling, space utilisation etc. I said that I thought this was a bit premature but that if that was the consensus I was happy for them to take the lead on it, after all it was what I had been asking them to do for the last three years.

They asked me to present an hour long session about my view of an art school. I had been doing quite a bit of background work on this already for my interview so it was relatively straight forward for me to put together some ideas about international trends and the position of YY School of Art & Design, what we could claim and some of the areas of strength I had picked up over the last three years. I was also aware of how I had felt with the massive, complicated statement that VC2 had presented as a vision for the University, and also about how Gary had responded to my vision of “a proper art school”. It really hadn’t opened up as much debate as I had hoped. People were still looking for me to tell them what to do, despite my constant aims to try and get them to take some “ownership” of the ideas and direction setting. I distilled the vision down to four key elements: Creative, Curious, Connected and Collaborative. The idea

was to try and encapsulate the international, collaborative elements in something shorter and punchier.

We all arrived at a beautiful country house for our two days away. The session started well, I presented a brief overview of the government agenda for higher education and how we were making sense of it. I detailed some of the key challenges for us and then talked about what my aspirations were, to not be world famous in Somerset, but to have some sense of our place globally and to be cited. I then talked briefly about how our portfolio could look a) if we did nothing; b) if we did some tweaks; and c) if we changed everything. I said that it was about bravery and how much we wanted to tackle and to take on. I was hoping that the team would take hold of the agenda that they had devised and lead the conversation, but there were long pauses and they were looking to me to “lead”. I went back to being the project manager for the day and lead us through the agenda. Everyone presented pretty much similar ideas and aspirations.

At dinner that evening a conversation opened up about the professors that the University was going to recruit for each school. I said that it was a great opportunity for us to get some staffing as we had not had the opportunity to add more staff in the three years that I had been there. There was a general disgruntled argument about why professors were bad, why so and so would not work. I let it go at that stage but remember going to bed feeling a bit flat. The next day we got into discussions about research agendas for the School. I had consistently said that we could not be good at everything and we needed to build areas of expertise around themes groups of people. At present we had a number of individual artists working by themselves, if they left we would have very little left. I had asked Gary to address this at least two years ago and I knew that he had spoken to all of the staff individually and that there were three key themes emerging and that some staff had got quite excited by them. But he had done nothing with it. We went over the same ground again, and ended up with the same conclusions. But then the conversation turned again to the reasons why we couldn't do it – people wouldn't engage, although they said they would, the University wouldn't help us, it wouldn't work, we didn't want to be associated with the University and why couldn't we become a private, independent art school. They felt that I had been taken away from them and that I wasn't supporting them even

though they knew I was in meetings a lot and had kept them up to date with key issues.

Damian said that he wanted more support over one of his staff members that he had problems with and wanted me to remove them. He said that the staff member hated me and so I should also feel the same way about him. Gary also said that there were colleagues of his that, although I seemed to have a good relationship with, they also bitched about me all of the time and I needed to remove them for him. No one else seemed to have been affected by the conversation except me and we all left the hotel fairly happy. I however stewed in the conversations during the night and over the weekend had worked myself into a state of extreme annoyance. We had once again found lots and lots of reasons not to do something. The University was against us, hadn't realised our brilliance and although we all knew that we could not keep doing what we had been doing, we were reluctant to change anything – the future portfolio looked the same. I decided that I would call an urgent meeting with the Head's of Department on the Monday. Only two of the three turned up. They looked worried. I asked where Damian was – he wasn't answering his mobile phone and his PA couldn't get hold of him. I considered not saying anything as I really wanted to talk to them all together, but timing was also important. I had rehearsed what I wanted to say and decided to talk to just Karen and Gary and for them to talk to Damian by themselves later. I started slowly and in a low voice. I was physically shaking. I said that I wanted to say something important and I wanted them to give me time to say it and then think about it and then come back to me. I said that we were progressively getting isolated from the University and that, yes, I had not been present at the campus much and appreciated that they did not feel supported, but I also needed their support. I said that I felt that a number of initiatives that the University had asked us to engage with we had found reasons not to do, that a number of things I had asked them to do they had not done and I had been left apologising or having to do myself; that other parts of the University had engaged with opportunities, made them their own and adapted them to suit. We had done nothing and it was being commented on and I was getting the brunt of the comments. I listed specific examples and talked about how they made me feel, being very conscious that I said it was about how we were working together – the DMan had made me pay attention to certain areas of my own practice. I talked about a lot of what we were doing together and wondered why

they had told me about staff hating me and calling me rude names. I said that I was under no illusions that everyone was nice to me and did not gossip, this is human nature and we all do it. In terms of management, I did not need them to like me but to do their jobs. I also thought it was highly unlikely that I would fire someone for saying rude things about me – if that was the case, then at some stage all of us would be fired. I said that I wondered if they realized how aggressive the statement that “PP thinks I’m a c****” was and what I was actually supposed to do about it. I carried on for about ten minutes in a slow voice and said that we needed to think about how we wanted to work together into the future. The room was quiet. Karen was nearly in tears and Gary was staring at the floor. I left them in the room and said we should meet again on the Friday. An hour later I received an email from Gary saying that he and Karen spoke for quite a while afterwards and realised that there was some truth in what I had said, that they enjoyed what we had already achieved in three years and were still coming to terms with the “Ron era” when they were told what to do and were shouted at if they came up with ideas. They agreed that the operational agenda was predominantly their role and that they should have taken ownership of it for the away day, and that they were too reliant on me giving them kind words and managing their anxieties and had not really paid attention to the fact that I would also have anxieties. They agreed that we needed to find better ways of engaging with the University agenda and that I needed support to not be isolated between “them” and “us”. Karen came and saw me the next day and agreed that none of us had been maintaining our relationships well or paying attention to what was going on in the bigger picture. She had written up some notes and I asked her to pass them on to the Vice Chancellor’s office. Gary had also drafted some key research agendas together and seemed to be taking some ownership of it. Damian I still hadn’t met and he was blissfully unaware of my outpouring. I asked Karen and Gary to brief him. I was conscious that if I did it one to one it could be taken personally and out of context. I wanted to keep a “togetherness” element. Damian wrote to me the following weekend echoing the same sentiments, and being very supportive about what we were all trying to do together. It was interesting to note that they had picked up a lot of the language and were talking about our social processes.

As part of our regular meetings, I asked Gary what he would like me to do. We had a long conversation about leadership and communication styles. He said that he had

worked out that he was earning only £40 more per week than one of the people he managed, who had none of the stress and was managing to build a research profile for themselves. He was questioning whether he wanted to continue in this role. What he wanted for me was to behave more like Margaret Thatcher. He said that, for him, leadership was about me telling him what to do and he would go and do it. “In the Thatcher regime no one remembers any of the cabinet ministers, just Margaret”. This was so at odds to my view of the world, but it was important for me to realize how I needed to present myself to Gary for us to work effectively together. I said I would be clearer in my instructions but I was also aware of how he felt when he was treated like this in the previous regime.

The processes of relating that were going on were on the surface quite similar – discursive, some power plays, some resistance, an increase in hidden transcripts – but I was particularly struck by the challenges to my own sense of identity.

Conspiracy theories as anxiety management

The process of identification is an ongoing dialectic between the individual and the group and one way of managing the resulting anxieties that arise is the development of conspiracy theories that try to explain the situation.

There have always been conspiracies. With the increase in communications and the media available to us, there appears to be an increase in the number of conspiracies that surround us. We can access opinions and data from around the world very easily and very quickly, but has the nature of these conspiracies changed? Historically these were categorised by magic and belief in the supernatural but then these were defeated by rationalisation and technological developments – a reflection of the cultural and historical conditions of the time. What Giddens called ‘the darker side of modernity’ [Giddens (1990): p7] has not been neglected. Marx saw the capitalist order as marked by class conflict. Durkheim described the anomie of industrial society and Weber wrote about the increasing disenchantment with the world as bureaucracy crushed individual spirit. Weber’s concept of the iron cage in industrial society provides the backdrop for an understanding of both uncertainty and control as the growth of sophisticated bureaucracies was supposed to remove anxiety from everyday life and

risk assessment and risk management became big business. Although risk calculations are about making the ‘incalculable calculable’ [Beck (1992): p100] at the same time the inexplicable grows and anxieties grow. We fantasise about what we believe to be going on, perhaps searching for rational answers to why things are happening. With C. we had built up such a high expectation of ambition, an academic-led model of decision-making that when things did not go as we had imagined, or we were put down, or decisions reversed we start to think of the reasons why they have not happened. What are the conspiracies behind the decisions: is she secretly going to merge us with another university, is she trying to clear out the top management to make way for “her people”, is she going to restructure? The power figure that we have created has not behaved in the way that we expected and so we start to feel something akin to loss, a separation anxiety almost from the collective that we had imagined.

George Eliot claimed “there is no action possible without a little acting” – the act then becomes a key component of linking rhetoric to creative action. VC2 has taken on the mantle of the Vice Chancellor in a very different way to FF. FF role-played his concept of a silent but thoughtful leader, taking his time to make decisions and then sticking to them, whereas VC2 has been everywhere. She has made a point of going to see people, hosting drinks evenings and dinners (she was after all the wife of an ambassador) and being seen. She has demonstrated enormous amounts of energy and rapid decision making, but it is in this latter part that the anxiety has challenged our personal issues of trust and belief in the public transcript. As already stated, at a general level the public transcript is pretty much the same across all institutes in higher education, but at the particular, specific level of gesture and response there are many details that inform and also contradict the rhetoric and also the belief that it is possible. FF always maintained a calm outlook with sound financial acumen. VC2 does not demonstrate this awareness and seems to be spending up large, significantly increasing the senior management team and redecorating a large number of buildings. She is also employing a number of external consultants, partly with a view to get an independent viewpoint, partly politically to be able to ‘blame’ the consultants for decisions, but I think more to help with her own anxieties. The public transcript and the personal transcript from VC2 are starting to blur as she seems not to be able to control her anxieties, and perhaps her own belief in the public transcript. As Scott notes ‘The public transcript, where it is not positively misleading, is unlikely to tell

the whole story about power relations. It is frequently in the interest of both parties to tacitly conspire in misrepresentation.’ [Scott (1990): p2]. The public transcript, although frequently changed, does come back to the constant theme of the university as a failing organisation with great prospects that only VC2 can lead us to, and then only with external help and new people – there are 43 new posts being advertised this summer. Scott notes ‘the greater the disparity in power between dominant and subordinate and the more arbitrarily it is exercised, the more the public transcript of subordinates will take on a stereotyped, ritualistic cast.’ [Scott (1990): p3]. Scott goes on to say that in these power relations the public transcript is an indifferent guide to the opinion of subordinates, and that the degree to which the dominant suspect that the public transcript is only a performance could challenge its authenticity. We offer a performance of deference and consent while attempting to understand, read and make sense of the intentions and mood of the powerholder. The powerholder, at the same time, is trying to make sense of what is going on behind the mask of the subordinates and their real intentions. Recent resignations and retirements have seen the hidden transcript rupturing in some places with a number of significant retirements and resignations. Everyone is still very polite in public, but as summer approaches and people head towards a month or so away, voices are starting to get louder. As Scott notes, ‘Actions by elites that *publicly* contradict the basis of a claim to power are threatening.’ [Scott (1990): p11]. Scott notes that hidden transcripts are social context dependent, and also more than just words but also about actions. He also notes that the ‘frontier between the public and hidden transcript is a zone of constant struggle between dominant and subordinate – not a wall.’ [Scott (1990): p14].

Conclusions

This project has focused on the development of the vision and strategy of the organisation by the new vice chancellor from the viewpoint of identity formation. I want to bring attention to four key areas: strategy and vision as an ongoing process; the role of the newcomer; brand as a social concept; and the embodiment of the brand.

Strategy and vision as an ongoing process

We have already argued the view that strategy should be seen as the ongoing narrative of the organisation. Strategy and vision are not documents separated from what the

organisation is doing, with a 'use by date'. In the narrative I am struck by how at a general level the language VC2 is using are very similar to the ones that I used when I arrived at the School. In fact, I would argue that the majority of narratives at this level of abstraction have the same overtones in every university. But it is when we get into the particular that the detail of the narratives starts to become more complex and rich. This self-similarity could be seen as fractal in nature, but actually the patterns are not self-similar, it is only the meta-narrative that is similar. Developing a strategy and a vision for the organisation provides a level of abstraction that cannot include all of the various stakeholders, otherwise it would reflect the same levels of complexities. So why do we develop them? Perhaps it is to do with the expectations of the group and the anxiety that is present when we face ambiguous situations. The notion of a strategy as a signal of intent that indicates a general direction can help with anxieties in the group and focus attention on certain projects and investments. Rather than a vision, perhaps it would be more useful to have visionary projects that bring that strategy to life and get the group into a process of doing sooner rather than later. After all, it is in the doing that we make sense of who we are.

The role of the newcomer

I have been particularly struck by the fantasies that have been built around the incoming vice chancellor and the superhuman expectations that have been attributed to her. Any person coming in to a position with such high expectations can only ever let some people down as soon as they start to do something that favours one group and not another. Someone known to the organisation would not have raised such high expectations. Interactional histories give information that is useful in assessing dispositions, intentions and motives of others. For example, if DVCA had been appointed in to the post of Vice Chancellor rather than an outsider, then there would possibly have been less anxiety with the familiar, but also less hope about change and the new. We would have had significantly different fantasies; in some respects, we would have had too much information to fantasise. Based on recent CEO succession literature, the CEO most likely to initiate strategic change is the new 'outsider'. Tushman, Newman & Romanelli (1986) found that externally recruited executives are more than three times more likely to initiate 'frame-breaking' change than existing executive teams. Studies have noted that the growing tendency to recruit outsiders as the single most striking trend in studies of Fortune 1000 companies from the late

1960s to the late 1990s. However the literature also notes that success rates are not that high. Most of these studies are based on large sample cross-sectional methodologies whose inherent flaw is to overlook the details of the dynamics of what is happening relationally in the organisation. Anecdotally, recent years have seen insiders succeeding to CEO positions – most notably at Apple. With a newcomer CEO we can fantasise about what they may be like, what they may do and the new interactions they may set up. As exciting and ‘hopeful’ as this may be, it is also countered by the anxiety of not knowing what they might do, how they might work and what changes to interactions they might bring. This leads to the situation where we try to find out from other sources what this person is like, their track record and their way of working – whether they have a reputation for redundancies for example. It is in these heightened situations of not knowing that fantasies and gossip start to become more prevalent. By paying attention to aspects of identity and identity formation we can try to make sense of the dynamics of what is going on in the organisation and how deliberate changes to the organisation are evolving.

Brand as social concept

If brand is a social concept then it could perhaps be seen as the “presentation of the organisation in everyday life”. More often than not we are dealing with re-branding in the sense that we are already working in an existing organisation with a history of interactions and hence an identity. There are analogies to Meads concept of the “I-me” dialectic in which we only make sense of the “I” when the “me” is manifested, but in that moment the “I” has already moved. The brand of an organisation therefore only really makes sense when the organisation does something, i.e. presents itself in everyday life. The vision, the strategy, the “I” work means nothing until interactions take place. Brand as the social manifestation of the organisation therefore cannot be about the preservation of an identity, but about the dynamic process of identity formation of the organisation, it is not what a brand is, but what a brand does. This requires a radical rethink about the notion of brand identity and how it is manifested. The notion of a logomark and of the brand police becomes problematic. We should therefore look at branding as a series of projects in line with strategy that brings action to the rhetoric. Branding therefore becomes about strategic management by projects.

Embodiment of the brand

Branding as a social act becomes more dramaturgical than embodied in the rhetoric of the symbols and words used to describe the brand, especially for a professional services firm. This means that the brand relies on the people in the organisation to a much greater degree. When it comes to issues of deliberate change, then the Vice Chancellor plays an extremely important role, embodying the brand. The way that she behaves and acts has an enormous effect on the ‘prototyping’ of the brand identity and how it is taken up. The neurotic behaviour, indecision and constant changing of mind had a profound affect on the anxieties of the group and hence the hidden transcripts to the extent that fractures started to appear. The dominant discourse around branding is around preservation of an identity and its consistent manifestation. Some of the reasons for this are around managing anxiety by presenting a ‘safe’ narrative that does not change that provides a simple solution in a complex and contradictory world. This can act to reduce anxiety and act as a form of inclusion by providing a mantra or script for people to follow. The role of anxiety in reflexivity is also important and hence there is a judgment around the vagueness in which we live. This is quite often at odds to the “certainty” that the dominant discourse asks us to engage with and also at odds with the notion of branding as preservation of an idea, a certain idea. We deal with anxiety in many ways, but in organisational life one significant way is through the development of fantasies that we tell each other and then end up believing.

Gossip is a significant indicator of identities within the organisation, the established, the newcomers, the aspirants, and the outsiders. The initial jostling for recognition that occurs when a newcomer CEO comes into the organisation encourages the generation of conspiracy theories and power dynamics that aim to influence the various groups that form. People jostle for power by being seen and also through the gossip about other groups; through the messages they choose to pass on and through careful words and phrases. Seemingly innocent comments start taking on significant meaning in this period of heightened ambiguity. We are all involved in this power dynamic of gossip and are all caught up in the process – even by not gossiping, we are part of the social control that is implied through gossip. We can be the gossiper and also the gossiped about. The principle is useful in the embodiment of the brand, but there is a balance between consistency and leaving scope for innovation and change. With a newcomer, organisational identification dynamics start to change in ways that

are considerably different from before and this has an impact on our theory of self – we start to not only question whether we have a feeling of belonging in the emerging organisational identity, but we also have almost a crisis of our own confidence that challenges our sense of ourselves. This in turn forms the organisational identity and so on. If a dissonance between the identities starts to arise, with weak identification between the sense of self-identity and organisational identity, then issues of trust are challenged. Trust is an essential element in constructive human interactions; it creates togetherness and a feeling of security [Mishra & Morrissey (1990)] and is both an interpersonal and a collective phenomenon [Shamir & Lapidot (2003)]. Atkinson & Butcher (2003) define trust as ‘the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party, based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control the other party’. This willingness to be vulnerable implies that there is something of value that could be lost. According to Borgen (2001), strong identification with the generalised other is a significant trust-inducing factor.

Stability and consistency are seen as the end game rather than on going meaning. As discussed previously, the aim of branding is identity preservation and control rather than a dynamic, ongoing process of negotiation and identification. However, to engage in meaning we do need some levels of consistency and hence simplifications otherwise it all becomes too much. It is in this negotiation that we constantly simplify and then bring back complexity, living with both together. The challenge is not to treat the simplifications and abstractions as realities but as foundations for discourse, and hopefully action. To be able to perform in everyday life we have to have the ability to make quick judgments and it is through this process of stereotyping that we start to be able to speed up things, but stereotypes are only a construct. In the process of strategising we start to develop the prototypes of new identities and we need to ensure that we stay open to them and pay attention to the constant process of negotiating around identity. Anxiety levels will change through the process and with that the notions of trust that people will have for a leader who is asking them to be vulnerable. A strong sense of identity is important for trust but it is also, paradoxically constraining when it comes to change.

Synopsis

The synopsis provides an opportunity to look back over the four projects and to try and make sense of the path that my inquiry took and how I now find myself thinking about strategic branding and identity formation. It is intended to enable me to explore issues of identity that emerged from the first project and to develop a core set of thoughts on how identity formation takes place in organisations, my role in it and how it links to brand strategy. To do this I have drawn, to a limited degree, on new authors to support my thinking on the identified themes.

The context of this research is one of higher education in the United Kingdom during a period of significant change due to economic and social pressures as well as, more recently, a change in Government policies. The first project is slightly different in that it deals with an autobiographical view of my thinking and hence is located in a number of different organisations and countries. The other three projects are all located in the same university and build on a series of events that took place over three years. The story starts with when I joined the institution and focuses on the interactions between me, the school and senior management as we developed a new brand identity, initially for the school and then for the university. I was fortunate to be in a position where a new Vice Chancellor was also appointed and took up her post, which allowed me to look at how identity formation was taking place around me with a newcomer.

The domains that have developed have been by nature eclectic, and reflecting back on Project One, it makes sense in line with my own experiences and reflected in my own intellectual journey. The initial theme of identity formation are soon developed into areas such as shared meanings, communicative action, mirroring processes, the role of the individual, narcissism, habitus, reflexivity in organizations, intentionality, emergence, the newcomer and leadership. The synopsis presents a summary of the four projects and the development of my thought as I move through the research.

In previous research projects I have written case studies in which the aim has been to develop ideas around branding and the design process, but these have been from a

synoptic point of view and present in some senses a very abstracted view of the process, smoothed down to make sense. The purpose of this research is to focus on what **is** happening rather than what **should** be happening and then trying to make sense of it. This research approach is discussed as a way of contextualizing the projects in a broader discourse based on the practice of management. The chapter then concludes with a discussion about what I am arguing for, what is useful and generalizable from the work and how my personal practice has changed in light of this study.

Project Summaries and Themes

The DMan programme is structured to consist of four projects and a synopsis. The first project is the only one that is specified and deals with the personal narrative about how we have become who we are and why we think the way that we think. In some respects it is an intellectual curriculum vitae that asks us to be reflective and to pay explicit attention to some of the key experiences that have informed our thinking. It starts to address the role of personal experiences in our education, but Dewey's comment 'The belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative' [Dewey (1938,1998): p. 25] means that we need to be discerning about which experiences we are paying attention to.

Project One

Project One is an attempt to make sense of why I think the way that I do and the experiences that have affected that thinking. The theme of a struggle for recognition and identity comes through, especially with the peripatetic nature of my career. The initial thoughts of moving from India to England was probably not as profound as the move from England to New Zealand, and what superficially appear to be similar cultures. It is in the similarities that, paradoxically, the differences are made much clearer. This challenges the notion of stereotyping and how we make initial judgments about places and people. Project One also demonstrates my movement from a structured education system in which things are ordered and deterministic, through a systems thinking perspective, to one that is more temporal and relational. It indicates

a trajectory of thinking, and beliefs that have led me to take up the ideas of complex responsive processes. This also links to how my thoughts around branding have changed over the years and makes explicit to me why I have been concerned about the social aspects of branding, why I have always been a reluctant brand strategist when it comes to organisations and cities and perhaps why these efforts have often been limited, conflictual and more problematic than the branding of objects.

I did not provide a description of branding in Project One but I provide one now – this is also indicative of how my own thinking had changed, and is still changing. Brands and branding have been around for many centuries, however the derivation and original sources are debated. Some trace the early origins to the Stone Age when hunters used specific “brands” to succeed in the hunt and mark their ownership [Almquist & Roberts (2000): p. 10]. Some trace the word from the Norse *brandr* meaning to burn after the practice of literally marking livestock as a sign of ownership [Keller (2003): p. 3], but it was during the 16th century that brands in the business world similar to those today started to emerge with some of the earliest known established by the English ceramicist Josiah Wedgwood and the French designer Rose Bertin [Burke (1996): Paola (1985)]. Artists would argue that they had been signing their artworks as a signal of authorship for many centuries before, but it is really in 18th century England and France that attention was paid to the development of procedures and theories about branding. Contemporary branding theories have their origin in mid 20th century primarily as a result of the development of commercials in mass media [Farquhar (1995): p. 10]. Since then the practice of branding has evolved through a number of stages from the early days of marking ownership through stages of trade names being recognized as an indication of quality and trust, but it is not clear if any specific theories were being developed.

I stumbled into branding as part of the process of commercialization when a group of us were trying to develop a product for the market. The advice we were given is that we needed a product brand that would allow us to differentiate our products from others, develop a personality and hence a link with the customer, and also to have some intellectual property we could defend. I had just come out of design school and so this made sense – it played very much into brand as ownership and brand as trademark viewpoint. We talked endlessly about ‘personality’ and ‘identity’ of the

product and the consumer group we were aiming at – it was a floor outlet box and the target market was architects and contractors, a rather personality-less product, however we took segmentation theory very seriously. We developed a logomark and a trademark, neither of which were memorable, but perhaps the best thing we did was develop a clear and comprehensive brochure. After many years I ended up looking into the process of branding more seriously as I had to teach it as part of a product design course. The design literature was light and focused on visual representation and the ‘experience’, predominantly in a physical interface sort of way. The marketing literature was a bit broader and, at the time, seemed to come from a more theoretical point of view, with branding seen as part of the marketing mix, developed from thinking about consumption and the role of mass media after the Second World War. I remember teaching about the importance of segmentation theory with the importance of demographics [Smith (1956), Yankelovic (1964)]; the concept of brand loyalty [Cunningham (1956)] using famous examples such as Coca Cola as exemplars; issues of lifestyle and psychographics [Lazer (1969)]; the marketing mix [attributed to James Culliton in Borden (1953)(1964)] and the four Ps [McCarthy (1960)]. But it was only when I started to actively work as a design consultant in this area that I started to question the thinking and the certainty around these ideas. The ideas were developed by marketing, advertising and design agencies without any significant focus on the underlying interactions that were taking place. Branding seemed to jump on the latest ideas of consumerism and how to ‘talk’ and ‘make meaning’ to consumers through storytelling [Roper & Parker (2006): p. 58]. Writers tried to position branding as the most important ‘thing’ a company could focus on, linking it to aspects of brand positioning [Ries & Trout (1972)] and brand equity [Simon & Sullivan (1993)]. However this backfired somewhat with people becoming more and more cynical about branding as propaganda, branding as manipulation. As consultants we were not only tarred by the consultant brush of charging a lot of money to say the obvious, but also by the oppression brush in that we would make people conform and enforce “values” on people. I had never been a brand manager in an organisation but as a consultant would espouse the importance of a steward of the brand. These “brand police” were to maintain the identity of the organisation, maintaining the power basis over the workforce and also the customers. In one respect it could be seen as corporate bullying.

The increasing influence of magazines such as *Adbusters*, Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation* and in particular Klein's book *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*, has signaled a global anti-branding movement in which companies are seen to be cynically directing their branding activity to global areas of concern such as environmental issues, human rights, colonialism and the degradation of culture: 'Standing in opposition to brands is no longer merely and antiestablishment badge for youth; it is a full-fledged social movement.' [Economist 2001]. Viewed from the position of the marketers of the 1960-1980s, this seems to make no sense. Companies such as Nike, Microsoft, Starbucks, Coke and McDonald's are no longer the heroes of the consumer branding movement, but now relentlessly attacked as the key players manipulating the media for their own selfish gains. Branding is seen as a whitewashing of what is really going on as companies aim to make more and more profit while hiding the real activities and the cost of their enterprises. This has further reinforced the general view that branding is not always a good thing to be doing. Having said that I still find that businesses are not keen to dismiss it, hoping that anything that can give them some form of competitive advantage must be useful, even if we do not really understand how to do it.

Many theories of branding have been developed from a practitioner's viewpoint and from the perspective of business schools. These have been predominantly based in the paradigm of management science and rational choice theory, although there has been some acknowledgement in recent years that a company does not "own its brand" and that it is a social construct. A variety of social scientists and humanities disciplines have routinely examined the bigger questions of how companies market and people consume. 'These accounts are dominated by the cultural authority narrative. Marketers are portrayed as cultural engineers, organizing how people think and feel through branded commercial products.' [Holt (2002): p 12] Organisations are seen as omnipotent and able to seduce consumers to participate in a system of commoditized meanings embedded in brands, and consumer culture is organized around the principles of homage to the cultural authority of marketers. Horkheimer & Adorno (1944/1996)] argued that the system of mass cultural production, a set of techniques for rationalizing culture as commodity, is the ideological glue that maintains consensual participation in advanced capitalist society. Moving on from their original Marxist politics, they presented the "culture industries" as taste, seduced by the mass

media industries of television, music, film and advertising. They argued that these new consumer identities were highly attenuated and produced primarily through choosing from a range of slightly differentiated goods. Segmentation is about ‘classifying, organising, and labeling consumers’ [Horkheimer & Adorno (1996): p 123] rather than providing product differences that are substantive. Product differences are quantitative and mechanical. Gramsci (1971) was more optimistic on the same thesis, arguing that some people are able to resist and take control of the meanings and uses of commodities.

Consumer culture is represented by the consumption code [Baudrillard (1998)], the system of cultural meanings that the market inscribes in commodities. The code is an important aspect of what Habermas (1985) termed ‘distorted communication’ as opposed to an ideal speech situation. Marketing is a form of distorted communication in that marketers control the information that is exchanged, organising the code, and we as consumers have no choice but to participate. Emancipation from this requires a reflexively defiant consumer [Ozanne & Murray (1995)], a consumer who is empowered to reflect on how marketing works as an institution and who uses this critical reflexivity to defy the code. As opposed to Horkheimer & Adorno (1996) who saw marketing as a totalitarian system, this has seen the rise of the notion of consumers as cultural producers. Consumers are gradually eroding marketers’ control through micro-emancipatory practices, practices that decentre market-determined subjectivity and that accelerate fragmentation [Firat & Venkatesh (1995): p 225]. However, both theories are premised on the same thinking about consumer culture and resistance. Consumer culture is an irresistible form of cultural authority that generates a limited number of identities accessed through commodities. Companies act as cultural engineers that specify the identities and the pleasures that will be received, but only through their brands. This notion of branding as part of cultural engineering is the dominant way that practitioners think of what they are doing. However with a fracturing of mass media and increased communication between individuals, the resistance from consumers to believe so blindly has started to change. At one level, plural identities are starting to develop in a much more fractured way than before, however, at a very local level, some of the interactions are still the same. The notion of *no logo* has ironically become a brand in itself, the *Occupy* movement has become a brand with a vision and culture presented as an identity. Branding

behaviour is very much linked to the notion of identity and identification and as a social object has relevance in communications and how people react to each other.

Project One starts to open up a direction in the general area of identity formation. Reflecting on what I wrote at the time, grappling with the method and trying to establish a research direction, I can see that the method in particular – of looking at what really goes on rather than what should go on – would be the challenge. This resonated particularly for me from when I was teaching branding from an academic perspective and then teaching it from an experiential perspective, weaving in old war stories.

Project Two: Organisational Identity

Project Two starts to develop a narrative specifically around the issue of developing a brand identity of the University. The narrative explores the process of engaging external brand consultants and pays attention to the communicative processes that were ongoing for me as the Head of School. The narrative starts with trying to persuade the Vice Chancellor that our identity not clearly articulated, and although our strategy was seemingly clear there was little link to the way we presented ourselves and what we claimed that we were doing. While the dominant discourse looks at brand strategy as being done to an organisation, albeit presented for everyone to live up to, the narrative clearly shows that life is always happening, culture is always happening and people continue to interact. The project starts to develop the key themes of processes of identification and how it is happening all of the time, even if we are in denial about it. The Vice Chancellor was always keen to state that we played the role at work and left ourselves at the door; he was reluctant to talk about what he stood for although he had strong beliefs around animal welfare, which did manifest themselves in certain policies in the University. The public performance of the role was what he saw as paramount, but as was pointed out, other people would make sense of that role in different ways, ie the individual cannot be taken out of the role. Too much focus on the individual and not enough focus on the individual have issues from a psychological perspective and I believe there are parallels in an organisation sense. The idea of organisational narcissism makes sense, especially when one considers the organisational behaviours in the banking industry that have become habitual. Even at a less extreme end, vanity plays a role in the organisation.

The Vice Chancellor was a proud man and although the articulated strategy of the institution was to not have a direction but respond to external factors, on a day to day basis there was a distinct personality to the organisation that was very influenced by the personality of certain players, especially those that had been there for many years. Some of the key players had been working together for many years and had well practiced acts. The dramaturgical nature of everyday life is brought to the fore, the way that we are both enabled and constrained in relationships and what emerges is a propensity to act in certain ways – what we do together becomes normalized until we have to do something significantly different. As Shotter (1999) says ‘An enormous number of our daily social activities occur spontaneously, we interlace our activities with those of others without, seemingly, having in any way to 'work out' how to do it.’ But at some stage we have to coordinate our joint actions. Mead, Elias and Bourdieu all point towards a process viewpoint with identity emerging from the evolving narrative patterns that play out at both the micro level and the macro level. This is an ongoing process of negotiation and the notion of branding was presented in this way of linking to what we fundamentally wanted to do – ie the strategy.

A link is also made to the idea of a common language between the constituents and hence the importance of shared meaning, beyond just shared phrases, and an emergent thought that branding, as abstracted labels and signals can be essential to the sensemaking process. As Vygotsky (cited in Wertsch (1985)), Mead (1934) and Weick (1995) state, they can be seen as signals or labels of action. They indicate intentionality. The narrative also demonstrates the importance of repetition and consistency; as both Goffman (1959) and Scott (1990) indicate, repetition makes the performance automatic and effortless. However there are limitations to this reduction of identity, whether individual or collective, to this singular abstraction. The dominant discourse takes the position that it is a singular identity and that all other identities will be at best suppressed and at worst annihilated. The notion of plural identities has no place and gets in the way of organisational aims. This became blatantly clear to me when the organisational identity work was being “done” to me, ironically by me. The idea that I could only be represented by an abstracted notion of organisational identity did not sit well with me and with many others – pretty much everyone else not in senior management and certainly in the art school. If we are to make more sense of branding then it needs to be viewed as a dynamic process and part of the constant

negotiating of identity that is always going on. Branding is not passive but offers opportunities for self-examination and reflection. Branding is a reflective tool that allows the members of the organisation to look at themselves as a collective, what it is they do together and the way that they do it. It could, and should be an important aspect of reflexivity in organisational activity, in the same way as mirroring is in personal identity dynamics.

Project Three: Institutionalising Identity

Project Three starts to look at how the developed identities that are proposed are institutionalized. The brand consultants have arrived and present a very bland image of ourselves for us to consider. Although we recognized ourselves in it, we are not flattered – and so continue the process of mirroring and reflexivity that informs us. The themes of repetition, power and control had emerged from Project Two, but are explored from a more Eliasian and Foucauldian perspective. For Elias and Foucault power is not something that someone possesses, but is a characteristic of all human relating. Elias (1939) argues that in order to form and stay in relationships we cannot do whatever we want. As soon as we are in a relationship we enable and constrain each other at the same time. The narrative focuses on my role with my School management team rather than my role in the University management team. Supposedly as Head of School I “have power” but as the narrative shows, this view of sovereign power is not helpful and looking at the processes of communicative interacting as relations of power provides a more realistic view of what is going on between us. So while the brand consultants had done their job, both N. and I were very conscious of our role in the relationship and how we would look if such a bland identity was played back to the organisation. We became very self aware and self critical choosing not to air it to the broader audience. Elias showed how power relationships form figurations in which some are included and others are excluded, this starts to develop distinct group identities, which are also being constantly negotiated, although there are some stereotypes and archetypes of behaviour being acted out. The notion of habitus is discussed with a discussion about local histories as well as the symbols of identification that are taken up, as Bourdieu noted the symbols of belonging are often ‘culturally arbitrary’ but also ‘real’. So it is never clear which symbols we develop will be taken up or resonate with the group, however someone must facilitate the dialogue in order to hold the context. The expectation of this role is

predominantly on the “leader”, in this case me. The notion of expectation of the individuals and the group is a theme that comes out of Project Three and in this theatrical situation there is the requirement for us to play the game to a certain extent and, as Goffman (1959) put it, demonstrate sanity. This performance of inter-relating does require there to be some structure to the conversation and so there is importance in not only the process of identity formation but also in the abstracted frameworks that result. People must have a sense of habitus and be able to communicate and negotiate with each other in the same terms about what it is that they are doing together for there to be a sense of collective or of institutionalisation. This is not say that it is possible to avoid habitus, but what I am drawing attention to is that habitus is inevitable, dynamic, in negotiation and mostly unconscious. Consistency and repetition do become an important aspect of bringing to attention the context for the organisation, as is the importance of the roles we play in organisational life.

Once again the theme of constant life happening is demonstrated throughout the narrative. There is an underlying expectation, as Durkheim (1933) suggested, that social life would not be possible unless social interests were superior to the interests of the individual. There is therefore a collective driver for sanity in the organisation and a collective holding on to strategic conversations. The collective rhetoric is by nature an abstraction that allows for sufficient vagueness in the way things are done, hence allowing for local differences and interpretations as well as space for creativity. This also plays into my own prejudices of not policing or controlling that brand identity too tightly and precisely. The local interactions also play out at a macro level informing the broader patterns and gestures. The notion of “charisma” is also briefly discussed, building on the viewpoint of Weber (1947) and bringing in some notions from complex responsive processes. Charisma arises in groups between people – one cannot be charismatic on their own. Weber spoke about charismatic groups, and although he took a religious and virtuous viewpoint, charisma is seen as an important aspect of identity formation and leadership. In the dominant discourse, charisma is also seen as an important aspect of leadership, but it is seen as a property an individual has. This presents a very static and limited view of charisma and does not demonstrate the role of “others” in groups, both leadership and charisma are social terms and are paradoxically both individual and collective terms. This ideological notion of stability as the norm comes up a few times in the research. Another key

theme that is reinforced is the importance of understanding the general and the particular and how we are constantly going between very specific details and very generic detail, often at the same time. This theme also resonates in the interview of the Vice Chancellor. In the movement of social relations, actions and ideas still have to be justified and people have to talk and be convinced.

Project Four: Deliberate Change and Dynamics of Identity Formation

Project Four moves from my own management of the School back to my role in terms of the University, particularly in relation to a new incoming Vice Chancellor. I was very fortunate in terms of the research direction to be presented with such an excellent opportunity to look at how our individual and collective identities were changing in reaction to such a strong individual coming into the organisation. Gossip, conspiracy theories, jostling for power all take place as people try to make sense of the newcomer and negotiate their own position in the hierarchy and power dynamics. The research focuses more succinctly on the area of deliberate strategic change and the dynamics of identity formation. The narrative highlights the nature of emergence and strategy as an ongoing process and the role of the newcomer in challenging orthodoxies, either directly or indirectly, purely by being the newcomer. The narrative looks at a very deliberate attempt to develop a new strategy for the organisation with the backdrop of the recent brand identity project that was completed. During the branding process the consultants were always keen to point out that the new Vice Chancellor had to be involved in the process even though she had not started yet. Their thinking was that she would embody the identity and hence would have to support the ideas that had been developed. The narrative develops along a number of themes, the first one around the newcomer and how one person can have such a profound effect on a very established group of people and how we behave so differently even though the work we are doing is essentially the same as before. The second is around the conversations that take place that are different to the ones that were going on before, how we respond to these and how, when they are less consistent, we are personally threatened by no longer knowing where we stand – and fundamentally who we are in the organisation. Identity formation takes a very chaotic path, and even though the branding work was the same as the “previous” organisation, we are significantly different. So even though the website and the visual collateral was the same, we were talking very differently and certainly behaving very differently. This really highlights

the difference between brand identity versus organisational identity, which has a much broader impact.

The notion of habitus and reflexivity is further discussed with the idea of repetition and time together as key factors in ideas of stereotyping and “the way things are done around here”. A key insight for me personally that emerges in Project Four is the role of the newcomer. With the previous narratives it becomes clear that I am a newcomer and so am grappling with issues of recognition, sensemaking, identification in a much more heightened way. There is minimal theory on the role of newcomers beyond the dominant discourse of a charismatic, hero leader who will present a vision for everyone to follow, and as the Project discusses, the theory of the first ninety days is dominated by ideas of doing things immediately while people are still making sense of who the newcomer is. The narrative, however, demonstrates some of the issues with this rather deterministic thinking, as we are not operating in a place with no history and no context. The narrative also clearly highlights the anxieties and conspiracy theories that develop in social life and how they are constantly being shared and evolving along with notions of power and resistance. There has been much written about the notion of organisational identity being linked to organisational performance [Albert & Whetten (1985)] and linked to issues of trust in an organisation [Tajfel & Turner (1979)]. But the viewpoint of an organisation struggling to make sense of its identity makes a number of simplifications that gloss over the fact that we are constantly grappling with processes of identification, that change is always happening and that there are shifting power dynamics. Although the notion of habitus is one that is constantly evolving, in some situations it is evolving much more dynamically than in others. What happens when key figures behave erratically? Under the previous Vice Chancellor there had been very similar conversations and patterns for decades, but under the new VC there was no consistency. Messages and instructions could change from minute to minute. The impact on identity in this situation was significant and also threatening. So after all of the expectations of an academic newcomer, conversations often turned nostalgic about the “good old days”, glorifying the past while also commenting on the present.

Brand as a social concept in this situation is plural and highly dynamic, but it is still essential that some form of sanity is maintained for the organisation. Some level of

consistency and coherence is necessary to maintain the dialogue. So even though the processes were chaotic, we still managed to perform and present ourselves to the outside world. However, the narrative also highlights how this is still a challenging and very personal process.

Interview

The interview with the new Vice Chancellor took place after I had taken up a role in another University and so it felt like there was going to be no real conflict in my questions. However, the interview does show how difficult it is to talk about what happens between us in a social setting, particularly in an organisation. We are constantly engaged in social life, and seem to do it without thinking, but it is very hard to actually bring to attention some of the things that may be going on between us. One of the key outcomes of the interview is how we, even knowing when things are not working, still persevere. The Vice Chancellor knew that all of the theory books she had been reading were simplistic and, even though she could see that the processes of communication were not rational and clear-cut, she still aimed to tidy up the mess of everyday life with a synoptic view of things. From a personal practice point of view, I do find myself much more attuned to the complexities and ambiguities of everyday life and paying attention to how intentions are being taken up and negotiated.

The interview also shows how the conversation is very generic – the university needs to have a clear international strategy, be clear of its identity, do more research, get more students, students of a high calibre; and I can imagine every university in the world having the same aspirations. Indeed, I said the same things when I arrived at the School. But it is the way that these are functionalized in which the richness of that particular context is highlighted. The Vice Chancellor was taking a somewhat detached role from the actual interrelating that was going on, it felt much more like an academic exercise devoid of context. The dominant discourse around measurement against key performance indicators lends itself to this viewpoint, being tidy and rational, but unfortunately with the result that we end up managing to outcomes rather than to what is actually unfolding at a day to day level.

Whereas the previous Vice Chancellor was very consistent in his views, admittedly with a long time in the post and hence well rehearsed roles and messages being played out, the new Vice Chancellor could not have been more of a polar opposite. Decisions were constantly overturned; there was constant undermining of individuals, delivered with an air of certainty. While the previous Vice Chancellor appeared to be certain in his decision-making but left enough opportunities for people to do what they want, the new Vice Chancellor was much more vague in the decision-making but much more certain in what we had to be doing. I felt that there was a tension in her black and white, rational position with her own academic expertise as a professor of media philosophy and this could explain some of the contradictions and erratic nature of some of her instructions. However, with a specialization in logic, there is a clear underlying rationality to her thinking and approach, but there is also the tension with her own intuition and her own sense of identity. There is a struggle for recognition that I also see in myself in terms of being taken seriously and as a “global citizen” with experience.

The interview, although not enlightening on its own, did reinforce some of the ideologies behind the decisions and the actions. It highlighted some of the premise of this research in that we are not entirely rational beings, are often contradictory, that intention is only part of the picture, that gossip is a key function of organisational life and needs to be taken seriously, and that we need to pay attention to the role of anxiety in trust issues. I did start to feel that the Vice Chancellor had taken on quite a lot with this role and was struggling to make sense of how to perform in real life rather than in theory.

Method

Social Life

If branding is a social practice then we need to consider the social viewpoint. We live in paradox: I am a unique individual with my own mode of existence, my own thoughts and emotions, my own body, and my own experiences of love, anxiety, work, and organisations. No one can experience the same life within the floating time structure of past, present and future. But I am at the same time a social being who plays predefined social roles which urge me to think, feel and act according to rules and patterns of my society. In this relatively simple proposition are embodied the basic existential problems of man in society and the theoretical core problem of the social sciences which try to analyse and interpret my social life. For centuries great thinkers have been struck by the fact that man is simultaneously unique and socially predictable, free yet socially conditioned, a producer and a social product, a being that creates and plays roles.

Martin Luther (1483-1546) was one of the first in the Western world to be aware of this dichotomy of man as subject and object, as a particular individual and a general social being. Interestingly, he was also the first to profess that man's authenticity was in the subjective and individual part of his being – at once separating it and anointing it with a higher status. He saw two realms – the internal and the external – and three estates – family, church and the state. In these three estates, as Luther formulated it, man lives as *homo internus* and as *homo externus*, the former being the free, religious man, the latter the socially conditioned man. For Luther the true realm of freedom existed only outside society. *Homo internus* was only answerable to God and was free from social responsibility. Ludwig Feuerbach made an attempt to place the problem in a non-theological, anthropological framework. In opposition to Hegel's idealism, Feuerbach chose the 'material', the body as the basis for his anthropology. Karl Marx in his theses on Feuerbach [Marx (1845)] admired him for his materialism, but criticized him for his determinism. Feuerbach also advanced the *altruistic principle*: the "I" cannot exist without a "you". Life, that is, corporeality, sexuality, love, language, interaction is impossible without a fellow person. Only through a non-I,

through someone else, does life become understandable and meaningful. This principle continued to dominate all discussion on intentionality and inter-subjectivity from Husserl and Mead to Sartre and Plessner.

Mead suggested the term “the generalized other”: the general discussion of the “I” and the “you” soon gets limited if the “you” is not enlarged into “the others”. In Mead’s social behaviourism, experiences and attitudes, mind and consciousness are viewed as inseparable components of one process – human behaviour. Mind and self as inherent parts of behaviour are not studied mystically through introspection but subjected to rigorous analysis. Mead proposed the concept of the “gesture and response” suggesting that they be taken together, inseparably, as the social act. Gestures are partly conscious and partly unconscious, they are partly attitude and partly action. They are simultaneously the beginning of communication and the source for all information. For Mead the gesture expresses the social ambiguity of man and is the stimulus for response on the part of another actor, which in turn stimulates a response on the part of the first actor. Mead’s thinking is that we move beyond the spatial metaphor of internal psychic process and external action process, and maintain the two together, holding onto the paradox. This was in contrast to Feuerbach’s view in which he saw religion as the outward projection of human inner nature. Norbert Elias also challenged this spatial separation arguing for the paradox to be maintained. In Mead’s thinking we put ourselves in the place of the other and act towards ourselves as if we were the other. In other words we can only make sense of the gesture if we address the gesture to myself, treating ourselves as if we were the other – only by taking on the role of the “generalized other” are we able to understand the conversation of gestures and the resulting interaction or linguistic communication. I internalize the attitudes of many others and these internalizations constitute what is social in me. The attitudes of the others show distinct similarities, what Mead called *institutions*, ie there are many such organized forms of behaviours which are collective and organized attitudes. Society and its institutions are therefore indispensable for the development and meaningful coherence of mind and self, intelligence and personality.

Various scientific approaches to the study of human life have fragmented the ‘total human’ of everyday experience into as many pieces as there are disciplines – homo

sociologicus, homo psychologicus, homo economicus etc. One of the aims of this study is to keep the whole for as long as possible, to hold on to the social ambiguity and to try and make sense of what is going on for the individual in the collective in the moment. One of the major implications of complex responsive processes is that the leader is a participant, not an objective observer, and responds to the complex patterns emerging as well as influencing them. Rather than be distracted by feelings of shame, anger, challenges to identity, the aim is to be reflective and reflexive about them. Luckman (1967) wrote that modern society shows ‘a discrepancy between the subjective autonomy of the individual and the objective autonomy of the social institutions’ [Luckmann (1976): p 63]. He went on to write that modernity had had a significant affect on social relations, related to a structural paradox: being pluralistic, modern society controls the individual in many different ways, but never totally. The individual is controlled by partial allegiances to different groups and by a power structure in which we are partly dominated as well as partly dominant, that is to say that in pluralistic society there is no coherence and uniformity of domination and control. As a result there are many opportunities for creativity, a theme I will pick up later.

In modern society we often complain about the social control that is imposed on us – complaints about the establishment, the system, all give us a feeling of powerlessness. The structural peculiarity of industrial society compared to pre-industrial society lies in its pluralism [Giddens (1990)] - the notion that industrial society is made up of various institutionally isolated sectors which require from the modern individual the ability to play disparate roles, thus imprinting on them disparate identities. Since such groups are becoming more and more short term and since no individual is able to completely adhere to several groups at once, the allegiance to the groups is necessarily of a partial and rather detached nature. This is particularly so in a higher education institute in which there are divided loyalties between the corporate organisation, the school structure and the particular academic discipline. The issues of control and freedom start to take on much more complex meanings. Power is often linked to the individual with authority linked more closely to the role. From a complex responsive process perspective power emerges in the social relations between people, and in the gesture-response communication power is far more fluid than this notion of sovereign power. This way of making sense of the power dynamics

makes us pay attention to the ways that we exert power and how we resist authority [Foucault (2000)]. Bureaucratic power is a common way for authority to exert power, with office hierarchy an essential element of bureaucracy. It creates ‘a firmly ordered system of super- and subordination in which there is a supervision of the lower offices by the higher ones’ [Weber (1948): p. 216]. The aim of these systems is to coerce and control the individuals in predetermined ways and to control the individual experiences. This is often enshrined in “internal communications”, “vision and values” and “brand guidelines”. Meanwhile, we also talk about the role of innovation in organisations and how important it is for growth and wealth creation. The individual is often no longer able to relate to this environment and the partial allegiance to various groups and groupings have led to an increased challenge to the sense of belonging and personal identity.

I am particularly interested in where these thoughts overlap and how to make sense of branding in a social context. This raises a number of initial questions: What context? For what social group? And who are the key players? The context for the research is of a Head of School of Art & Design in a higher education establishment. More specifically I am interested how I as a head of school lead and manage identity formation in YY School of Art & Design.

Complex Responsive Processes

In the 2001 edition of *Emergence* journal, Steven Phelan wrote an article about “What is Complexity Science, Really?” in which he tried to make some sense of the various literature and viewpoints on the complexity sciences, challenging the notion of each word. He argues that ‘Complexity is a new science precisely because it has developed new methods for studying regularities, not because it is a new approach for the studying the complexity of the world.’ [Phelan (2001): p130]. He goes on to say ‘Complexity science posits *simple* causes for *complex* effects’ [Phelan (2001): p130]. He goes onto argue that complexity science is not general systems theory, nor post modern science, nor a set of metaphors or analogies based on resemblance thinking. Many authors have expressed anxiety with the application of these systems models to human social systems – we are not autonomous agents who operate by simple rules and behave rationally as do the agents in the complex systems computer models.

These agents do not wake up grumpy one day, or fall in love [Stacey 2003]; Brown & Duguid (2000)]. Others have questioned the use of complexity metaphors in social systems also commenting on the distinction between the model being seen as a model as opposed to being taken as the reality [Galbraith (2003); Stacey (2012)].

Stacey (2003) provides an alternative view to the systems thinking model, employing process thinking rather than systems thinking. By drawing attention to the ongoing dynamics of relating Stacey develops a model of complex responsive processes. Complex responsive processes are ongoing reflexive processes of interacting that theorize organisations as social and psychological processes. This aims to go beyond metaphoric insights and pay attention to the social and psychological processes of interrelating. By paying attention to the dynamics of language, conversation and power relations the complexity of the local interactions plays out in macro-patterns. By viewing the individual as an essentially social being the organisation develops in self-organising processes of communicating which may generate creativity and novelty [Stacey (2003)]. There is a paradoxical argument in this thinking, although the focus of the communicating is in the narratives, not the key individuals, as the basis of emergent self-organisation, the role of the individual is also important, as they are not only being formed by the patterns of communication but they are also forming the patterns of communications at the same time.

This way of looking at organisations as complex processes of interrelating challenges the way we make sense of issues such as 'power' and 'control'. These processes of managerial life become about participation in local interactions with patterns being played out in complex ways and emerging from ongoing communications. Complex responsive processes require us to pay attention to social and psychological factors, ie what is happening to us and also what is happening between us.

The inclusion of the individual as the key instrument for observation and narration further leads to a narrative method of inquiry. The aim is to make sure that the viewpoint of the individual is taken into account and that the narrative is analysed acknowledging my experience in interrelating and declaring it up front. Project One is an exploration of my experiences, biases and viewpoints. By declaring them up front one is able to start to develop a more generalizable understanding of the narrative.

Through a process of iteration the narrative is further explored in a community of inquirers, more immediately in a learning set and more generally in the learning blocks and community meetings. Through constant engagement with these key inquirers and supervisors a shared sense is made of the narrative and, in conjunction with established literature, the ideas are contextualized in a broader context. Project Two starts to bring in the key animating question of inquiry into organisational life and this is further focused in Projects Three and Four. By the nature of the method of inquiry there is a progress and movement of thought as a thicker description of what is going on is presented and developed. The reader will see Project One develop in more conventional ways as I grapple with trying to see things from the viewpoint of complex responsive processes and will hopefully be able to see the movement of thought from project to project. This synopsis aims to reflect back on the projects and try and make generalizations from the specific conclusions raised in each project.

Ethnographic Studies

Ethnomethodology is an ethnographic approach to sociological inquiry that is interested in the study of the production of social order and how society's members make sense of their world. [Garfinkel (1967)]. Based on the writing of Harold Garfinkel, Rawls states 'Ethnomethodology is a thoroughly empirical enterprise devoted to the discovery of social order and intelligibility (sense making) as witnessable collective achievements' [Rawls (2000): p146]. The assumption is that a local social order exists and can be witnessed in the scenes that are produced. 'Ethnomethodology ... is not a methodology, but rather a study of methodology' [Rawls & Garfinkel (2002): p 122] and as such does not have a set of established research methods but is the study of 'member's methods'. This deconstructive approach of ethnomethodology is based on Garfinkel's systematic effort to investigate the foundational processes through which everyday social activities, circumstances and structures are formed and rendered intelligible. Influenced by the phenomenological positions of Husserl, Garfinkel proposed that the experiential reality of any social phenomenon rests upon certain prescientific or common-sense methods of reasoning.

‘Garfinkel directed attention away from essentially mentalistic processes and toward forms of reasoning which are embodied in ordinary social activities and are thus publicly available. In a sense, Garfinkel sought to ‘deconstruct’ orderly social phenomena to lay bare the constitutive methods of reasoning-in-action through which phenomena are produced, recognized, and rendered accountable by societal members In local environments of action.’ [Clayman (1995): p106-7].

This is often perplexing for the traditional social sciences as analyzing such methods is intrinsically difficult because they are normally not “visible” to actors in everyday affairs. The idea of ‘common-sense’ could also be potentially problematic, but Garfinkel gets around this by focusing on extraordinary situations in which the sense making is highly exaggerated and hence more conspicuous. In some cases Garfinkel would engineer some of these situations and his studies were an attempt to render a positive characterization of the processes of social life rather than their accountable products. This brought in a constructive dimension to the essentially deconstruction of social processes. Whereas Durkheim proposed the study of social phenomena as an objective exercise, Garfinkel’s alternative reading was that the objectivity of social facts was an achievement of society’s members and that this achievement should be the focus of the study. By documenting how members rely on background knowledge of the circumstances to make sense and respond to particular actions he showed how members’ grasp of the circumstances is contingent and revisable in light of developing courses of action. The result is a view of how micro interactions lead to macro patterns, how these are incrementally and collaboratively assembled in real time.

This takes a fundamentally different view of social action than conventional approaches that conceive of action as rule-governed. Talcott Parsons argued that internalized social norms determine actions under given circumstances, providing for the production of larger institutional structures. Such theories presuppose that actions, situations and the rules through which they are repetitively linked are independent entities. This becomes a deterministic exercise in which the answer is to ascertain the circumstances and the inclinations and hence the particular courses of action. Garfinkel’s investigations takes a profoundly different view – each situation must be

regarded as the emergent and flexible product, rather than the container of, its constituent actions. It takes the position that norms, conventional and other rules of conduct are similarly flexible and evolve over the course of the interaction. This is not to say that norms are irrelevant but their primary significance is constitutive rather than regulative. Norms are referred to and invoked by societal members as a resource for recognizing discrete actions and the circumstances in which they are played out. Garfinkel's work could also be categorized as a grounded methodology, but with a particular focus on process. If ethnomethodology is conceived as a form of both deconstructive and constructive inquiry as opposed to purely deconstructive, then it starts to develop a more generalizable aspect and hence relevance beyond the partial and provisional development of the narrative.

Discursive Practices

Narrative methods can be found primarily in the case studies that are used in management research in which a chronology is used to organize the narrative. In this context the narrative has a specific purpose to illustrate a point and move the reader to an understanding of the conclusions being made. It is usually an archaeological presentation and by nature becomes a synoptic presentation of events. Foucault's method of discursive practices was an attempt to interrogate how truths come to be accepted historically and was based on the assumption that the 'object, in all its materiality, cannot be separated from the formal frameworks through which we come to now it' [Foucault (2008): p 6] frameworks that Foucault referred to as 'discourse' or discursive practices. His concerns were to do with the challenging of dominant discourses. Foucault encouraged the focus on to specific, precise descriptions of individual happenings rather than general ideas. He contended that generalities led to researchers being selective in their analysis and to ignore the small things, which might question their thinking. Foucault's method shifted from an objective archeological approach to 'genealogy as a method of diagnosing and grasping the significance of social practices from within them' [Dreyfus & Rabinow (1982): p 103]. Flyvberg describes this process as problematic in that it allows the researcher to remove themselves from the process [Flyvberg (2001): p 135] and become a disinterested participant. This splitting in the hermeneutic interpretation could be seen as Elias' paradoxical involved-detachment. The narrative in this case is taking

experience seriously and transforming it into inquiry [Dewey (1925/1958)]. Dewey, in his reflection on experience, saw human experience as being both personal and social at the same time. Bruner (1986) discusses two ways of ordering experience: the logico-scientific and narrative modes of thought, arguing that although complementary, they are not reducible because they imply different assumptions of causality.

This seems to lend itself to inquiry in complex responsive processes except for one significant factor – the role of the observer in the process. A key aspect of the work of Stacey et al is to focus on management practice as something that one does – so what is my role in managing in organisational life and how do we take experience seriously? Auto-ethnography is a form of method that involves self-observation and reflexive investigation in the context of ethnographic fieldwork and writing [Marechal (2010): p 43]. It differs from ethnography in that it embraces and foregrounds the researcher's subjectivity rather than attempting to limit it or ignore it. By bringing to attention personal thoughts, feelings and observations as a way of understanding the social context the aim is to provide, not only a reflexive element for one's own practice, but also not to artificially separate the researcher from the research. Ellingson & Ellis see auto-ethnography as a social constructionist project that rejects the dichotomous oppositions of objectivity and subjectivity, process and product, self and others and the personal and the political [Ellingson & Ellis (2008): p 450]. This could be seen as a form of Action Research, but I would argue that the dominant purpose of Action Research is to maintain a sense of objectivity, whereas the purpose of this research is to very much put the subjective into the research. Over the decades many methods have evolved around action research with the focus being more on the actions taken rather than an attempt to include details of the actor *in* the action [Burns (2007)]. Autoethnography is a form of self-reflection and writing that explores the researcher's personal experience and connects it to wider cultural, political and social meanings of understanding. The aim is not to get to a universal truth but to make sense of organisational life as a dean in a higher education institute and then extrapolate to see what broader sense can be made from that. As Wittgenstein argued, it is about shared understandings:

‘...think of the following use of language: I send someone shopping. I give him a slip marked 'five red apples'. He takes the slip to the shopkeeper, who opens the drawer marked 'apples', then he looks up the word 'red' in a table and finds a colour sample opposite it; then he says the series of cardinal numbers—I assume that he knows them by heart—up to the word 'five' and for each number he takes an apple of the same colour as the sample out of the drawer.—It is in this and similar ways that one operates with words—"But how does he know where and how he is to look up the word 'red' and what he is to do with the word 'five'?" Well, I assume that he *acts* as I have described. Explanations come to an end somewhere.—But what is the meaning of the word 'five'? No such thing was in question here, only how the word 'five' is used.’ [Wittgenstein (1953): p 1]

In *Philosophy of the Social Science* Baert argues that ‘the philosophy of the social sciences ought not to assume that the sole objective of social research is to explain an outer world. It should also ponder alternative models of knowledge acquisition’ [Baert (2005): p1]. He goes on to talk about the spectator theory of knowledge or what Shotter refers to as “aboutness-thinking” [Shotter (2005)(2010)]. The aim is to develop an understanding based very much on the context of what we observe and who we are, but also to generalize from it. ‘Rather than to do with us relating ourselves to our physical surroundings, it is primarily to do with us – even when alone – relating ourselves to each other as a members of such a group and coordinating our actions together. Thus, it is a kind of knowledge one has *from within* a social situation, a group, an institution, or a society, and which exists only in that situation.’ [Shotter (2010): p 26]. Shotter goes on to talk about “witness-thinking” encouraging an approach that presents an alternative view to abstract and general theories by looking at particular and specific situations:

‘*Witness (dialogic)-thinking* is a form of reflective interaction that involves coming into living contact with another’s living being, with their utterances, their bodily expressions, their words, their ‘works’.’ [Shotter (2005): p 54]

He contrasts this with aboutness-thinking by referring to Bakhtin: ‘(in its extreme pure form) another person remains wholly and merely an object of consciousness, and

not another consciousness... Monologue is finalized and deaf to the other's response, does not expect it and does not acknowledge in it any *defensive* force.' [Bakhtin (1984): p 293]. The aim is to represent a living present, the acknowledgement that in everyday life there are constant interactions that "call-out" responses that are not predictable. Complex responsive processes by their nature lend themselves to a narrative method of inquiry that locates itself in the grounded, commonsense of ethnomethodology and the personal narrative of auto-ethnography. The question then arises as to the nature of "narrative" and the differentiation between a good story and research inquiry, and how we make it more than personal development. According to Bochner & Ellis an auto-ethnographer is 'first and foremost a communicator and a storyteller ... (ethnography) depicts people struggling to overcome adversity' [Bochner & Ellis (2006): p 111]. The main critique of this focuses on the overly personal nature of the writing and the focus on the "researcher as hero" and hence the validity of the research. The work is 'termed unscientific, or only exploratory, or entirely personal and full of bias' [Denzin & Lincoln (1994): p 4]. Interpretive research, Geertz argued, lacks precise criteria for evaluating cultural interpretations, but, Geertz argued, there were good and bad interpretations: 'a good interpretation of anything – a poem, a person, a history, a ritual, an institution, a society – takes us into the heart of that of which it is the interpretation.' [Geertz (1973a): p 18]. Geertz does not offer an account of what is good ethnography, but Ellis (2004) presents a summary of what she considers as good:

1. Substantive contribution. Does the piece contribute to our understanding of social life?
2. Aesthetic merit. Does this piece succeed aesthetically? Is the text artistically shaped, satisfyingly complex, and not boring?
3. Reflexivity. How did the author come to write this text? How has the author's subjectivity been both a producer and a product of this text?
4. Impactfulness. Does this affect me emotionally and/or intellectually? Does it generate new questions or move me to action?
5. Expresses a reality. Does this text embody a fleshed out sense of lived experience?

The DMan programme has a structure in which each researcher attends quarterly residential blocks and inquires into the nature of complex responsive processes sharing their work with fellow researchers and faculty. In addition the researcher is part of a smaller learning set with fellow researchers and supervisors in which each individual's work is critiqued in detail and iterated until there is shared meaning made of the narrative and the analysis of the narrative. There is another validity check made by other members of the faculty who also provide a critique of the work after a number of iterations have been made. Through this process of constant meaning making the above five criteria are discussed in detail. The thesis itself forms another part of the validation by having to make a statement of why the research is relevant, what is generalizable from it and how it has made a contribution to the field. This is further exposed to critique by two external examiners. This goes some way towards what Ellis suggests, to judge the research in the usefulness of the story [Ellis (2004): p 126]. This also has a bearing on what we mean by "generalizable" – readers provide theoretical validation by comparing their lives to the narrative and if it has resonance. The focus is on whether there is a 'naturalistic generalization' [Stake (1994): p 195] and whether the work has the possibility to change the world [Denzin (2000): p 256]. At a personal level the research has to have connection to action in particular to what I find myself doing while managing and how my thoughts around that have changed over the study. This reflexivity is also an aspect of whether the work has the potential to change actions. The narrative in this case is taking experience and transforming it into inquiry [Dewey (1925) (1958); Ramsey (2005); Cohen (2007)]. Dewey also had a particular view of human experience seeing is as being personal and social at the same time – we are always relating in a social context. Complex responsive processes also echo this way of seeing things as happening at the same time – there is no duality between the individual and the social.

Thick Descriptions and Thick Performances

In his seminal work *The Interpretation of Cultures* Clifford Geertz outlined culture as 'a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life' [Geertz (1973): p 83]. Influenced by philosophers Gilbert Ryle and Ludwig Wittgenstein, Geertz drew on the tradition of ordinary language philosophy

with a view to interpreting culture's web of symbols by isolating its elements, specifying the internal relationships among those elements and characterizing the whole in some general way: 'a continuous dialectical tacking between the most local of local detail and the most global of global structure in such a way as to bring both into view simultaneously' [Geertz (1974): p 43]. He also argued for the importance of acknowledging the role of the researcher: 'The myth of the chameleon field-worker, perfectly self-tuned to his exotic surroundings – a walking miracle of empathy, tact, patience, and cosmopolitanism' [Geertz (1974): p 27]. Geertz's aim was an attempt to refocus anthropology away from the emulation of the natural sciences toward a reintegration with the humanities, proposing that social study be about meaning rather than behaviour and seek understanding rather than causal laws, rejecting the mechanistic nature of the natural sciences. In *Thick Descriptions*, a term he borrowed from Ryle, Geertz affirms that culture is symbolic and meaningful, involving neither behaviour nor social action directly: 'The concept of culture I espouse is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.' [Geertz (1974): p. 5]. It is this concept of culture that is, for Geertz, the key to the analysis of cultures, each of which has its unique configurations. 'Analysis is the sorting out of structures of signification and determining their social ground and import' [Geertz (1974): p 9] and through this analysis, ethnography becomes 'thick descriptions'. Geertz also prefers a 'microscopic' approach to ethnographic description, the micro interactions of relating that result in emergent macro patterns. He argues that small facts speak to large issues.

'Cultural analysis is (or should be) guessing at meaning, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses, not discovering the Continent of Meaning and mapping out its bodiless landscape.' [Geertz (1974): p 20]

This process of intelligent guessing, at first appears to be "unscientific" but was first introduced by Charles Sanders Peirce as a valid aspect of reasoning, calling it

abduction, and including it alongside with induction and deduction. In 1903 Peirce called pragmatism “the logic of abduction”, linking it to the pragmatic maxim:

‘Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object.’ [Peirce (1903)]

By considering the practical bearings of our observations we are able, through articulation and iteration to develop a sense of what may be happening. The reflective part of the method is developed through introspection and group inquiry based on the Elias’ idea of involved detachment [Elias (1987)]. The idea is that the researcher locates their way of thinking among the wider thinking and history of human interactions while being able to make critical distinctions about these interactions [Stacey & Griffin (2005)]. The self narrative aspect aims to ensure that there is a link between practice and method and as Giddens (1987) states, that we are able to ‘turn back upon’ and monitor our own actions. This ‘thick performance’ of thought, reflection and connection and not just the thick description aim to mitigate the issue of subjectivity [Sergi & Hallin (2011)]. In conjunction with the methodology of the DMan programme of iteration and exposure to a learning set and a community of inquirers a status of involved-detachment is aimed at. This aims to keep the paradox of the individual and social to allow a collective and personal sense to be made of the situation.

In addition to the narrative method I conducted a face-to-face semi-structured interview with the Vice Chancellor. The aim was to get a sense of how she saw things and how she felt the first few months of her tenure had gone. Rather than using the interview as a self-contained statement detached from the broader research objectives I want to use the interview to inform my understanding of where the Vice Chancellor is coming from: ‘(I)nterviews are occasions in which ... “informants” construct themselves and others as particular forms of moral agents.’ [Atkinson & Coffrey (2003): p 116]. The issue is always trying to differentiate between fact and fiction, however, in the spirit of the method, it informs the broader understanding of the person on the process. Atkinson & Coffrey go on to say that ‘(w)e cannot take the interview as a proxy for action’ [Atkinson & Coffrey (2003): p 117].

A key aspect of the research must include how the researcher is responding to what is being discovered. This reflective and reflexive process could be seen as linked to Dewey's particular view of human experience. Because the experience is defined as relating between self and others, the reflexive part of the method emerges in two ways: how the researcher takes up and reflects on how they make sense of their life story in relation to experience and how they reflect on it; and how the researcher locates their way of thinking in the wider community and history of human interactions. The challenge from a research perspective is how to make sense in a broader sense from them, how we can 'from rare, unrepeatable, unique, fleeting, and utterly particular experiences, learn something general, something we can carry across to other circumstances.' [Shotter (2010): p 23]. Bernstein (1983) refers to this as "practical-moral knowledge" and relates it to Aristotle's notion of *phronesis*, 'knowledge not detached from our being but determinative of what we are' [Bernstein (1992): p 25]. The research method here, rather than separating into notions of qualitative and quantitative is what Alvesson & Skoldberg (2000) refer to as 'reflective or reflexive empirical research', meaning that serious attention needs to be paid to the way different kinds of linguistic, social, political and theoretical elements are all acknowledged during the process of interpretation. This encourages an eclectic approach to method. Reflexivity, by nature, constantly assesses the relationship between "knowledge" and the "ways of doing knowledge" [Calas & Smircich (1992b): p 240]. The careful interpretation and reflection are developed in an iterative way in conjunction with a learning community, with the aim that each iteration is deeply interrogated for sanity, with each iteration providing a deeper and deeper understanding. In summary the method is based on an auto-ethnomethodological approach to making shared sense of organisational life through the iterative development of personal narratives. Through induction, deduction and abduction theories are developed to explain what is happening and how this can be generalized to other contexts. The aim is to develop thick descriptions and thick performances of organisational life with a view to make sense of what is happening for the individual and the social. From this constant iteration and engagement it is anticipated that generalizations for organisational life can be made.

Movement In My Ways Of Thinking And Practice

There are a number of key themes that arise from the projects, some that link to a growing understanding of myself in some respects as a continuation of Project One, and some that are linked to how I am making sense of branding in organisational life and the link to the processes of identification.

Identity Formation

Identity formation is an ongoing process and a core part of social life. Branding in the sense of organisational life is also an ongoing process, and is happening whether an organisation pays attention to it or not – people are building up impressions from their interactions with each other and applying these to the organisation as a whole. The notion of organisational branding needs to be rethought in light of what is really happening as opposed to what we would like to happen, or have idealized as happening. This is a fundamental challenge to ideologies of static cultures and identities and a fundamental change to the way branding of things has been applied to organisational life. Much has been written about strategy as a ‘crafting’ process that is dynamic and ongoing [Mintzberg (1989)], but this still separates the individuals from the process, it still assumes a detached, objective position in the development of strategy and brand identity, as if it is an external material like wood or clay. Chia & Holt (2006) argue that in strategy formation theory and practice are happening at the same time and that it is an iterative process. Strategy processes are not deterministic and are constantly being negotiated and adjusted as we make sense of what we are doing together in light of who we are, how we are feeling, how we perceiving threats, being recognized, stereotyping and prejudging. This is particularly heightened when a newcomer comes into the organisation, especially one in a senior position. The dramaturgical nature of social life is particularly emphasized in this situation with expectations, fantasies, conspiracies, positioning and power dynamics constantly playing out as we not only try and make sense of ourselves and the collective, but also try and influence the hierarchy. Identity is inextricably linked to what it is that we do and there is a feeling of threat as well as opportunity in the new patterns that are forming and being negotiated.

Organisational branding is a social process that is constantly evolving as we interact. Bourdieu's notion of a "good player" highlights the dramaturgical game and that there are notions of manipulation, practice and reading the game that highlight some of the aspects of paying attention to what is going on around us, activities that both enable and constrain what it is that we do and can do. The dominant branding discourse of a vigilant strategy that aims to preserve the past is only one aspect of the narrative patterns and there are many ways in which this can be resisted, opposed, derailed, as well as enforced and maintained. We have this constant battle with this notion of maintaining the status quo while also acknowledging the change that is inevitably always going on. This simplification of identity to a usually single proposition can be both useful and debilitating at the same time – it provides a platform for dialogue, for reflection, but can also be a threat to our sense of who we are. It has been argued that modernity has played havoc with our sense of identity and that organisational life now plays such a significant role in who we are, but there appears to be little real study about what is happening for us as we engage in discussions about strategy – which after all is an indication of what we do together, and hence an part of our identity.

Pay Attention

The idea that one can envisage a future, especially for an organisation, and then plot a clear path towards it, with all the human agents clearly lining up and recognizing the benefits is a seductive one. It implies a level of control, determinism and rationality, but like all human activities it is governed by values and those values may not be the same as the values that govern the activity of the instigator [Kahneman & Tversky (2000)]. This raises questions concerning the legitimacy of severe abstraction and idealization – such claims by nature are exaggerations, but we cannot manage if we are not willing to simplify and abstract from many complications in order to act, but how much simplification, idealization, abstraction or 'isolation' [Maki (2006)] is legitimate? The research method in this programme encourages us to look at what is going on between the participants and not to over simplify what we think is going on, or indeed what should be going on. In Project Two the Vice Chancellor makes some sweeping generalizations about the strategy of the organisation and the causal links between the economic performance of the University and his three core platforms for

evaluation. It is also interesting to note that in some ways both vice chancellors assumed a rational way of behaving for their staff although they functionalized it in very different ways. The first appeared to be very clear in his instructions and decision making, but there was vagueness in how the initial initiative was developed, based on an intuitive leap of how he felt about the individual. He would then be very clear that the decision was made, sometimes glossing over the fact that some of the decisions could be, and often were contradictory and conflicting. The second on the other hand would appear to be very certain about some aspects and then very vague or changeable about the actual actions she expected from those decisions. Both ended up creating anxiety and tension for people, increasing gossip and hidden narratives in the organisation. In F.'s case there had been decades for people to get used to him and so there was at least some predictability in his actions, although this did seem to get erratic near the end of his term. People had time to get used to his "style" and so, although there was gossip about a lack of ambition and motivation, there was less anxiety about what he would do. In C.'s case, she was a new and unknown force. Not only did people not know how to react to some of her comments, her comments and behaviour was also erratic. So although there was clarity in her ambition and she was consistent in her rhetoric, the functionalizing of the strategy was erratic, how she wanted us to "perform" changed regularly, how she spoke very personally and then very officially changed erratically, leaving us anxious and nervous about our role, our relationship and fundamentally our identity.

Paying attention to these two very different behaviours, both premised on the notion that a clear strategy would direct human activity clearly shows how very different things can be. At a very abstracted level you could argue that things are essentially the same, but at a day-to-day level and at a very personal level things are very different. Not only is it impossible to say what level of abstraction and simplification is useful, but also it is problematic, and I would argue unhelpful to build a rule of thumb around this concept. We do, however, need to recognize that there is an essential requirement for us to simplify, not to only communicate, but also to act. Strategy, as has been argued by many is not an independent, standalone document devoid of context, but a social document from which causal claims become difficult. The dominant discourse makes claims for the use of causal language explicitly and literally. Yet this is not the case. Looking at temporal aspects of what we are doing together, and paying attention

to what is happening for us in these interactions brings to our attention the really rich and complicated issues surrounding not only what we end up doing, but how we feel, how we make sense of ourselves and others, what we find ourselves talking about and the way we talk about it. The strategy takes on a life of its own. Strategy and the narratives that build are inextricably linked to a sense of what we do and who we are. This is challenging for both individual and collective.

The notion of process

I am also struck by the notion of “due process” that is often articulated for the legitimacy of planning and strategy. The branding strategists always come back to the notion of process to demonstrate that due diligence has taken place and that, since they have followed a logical process, the conclusions that they arrive at are logical and induced or deduced from the data that they have been given or observed. There is a claim to validity and credibility, and also I believe to some form of determinism that the process will lead to “the answer”. My observations are that there is a lot of guessing that goes on – admittedly educated guessing with, in this case, years of experience, but nonetheless, guessing that drives the more vague end of the process. Reflecting back on the beginning stages of the process there is the theatre of interviewing many people, of being seen to be systematically collecting data in a “scientific” manner, but then there are the creative leaps that are made as ideas are synthesized and presented back to us. The process appears to be far from smooth, linear or non-linear. I would argue that the process is more staccato in nature and that a narrative is then built in a synoptic manner that develops a logical, coherent argument. Charles Sanders Peirce coined the term “abduction” in his work on the logic of science in order to denote a type of non-deductive inference that was different from the inductive type. Although it is not clear what Peirce specifically meant by the term, his use was different to the way that it is currently used [Fann (1970)]. The current thinking about abduction seems to belong to the “context of justification”, the stage of scientific inquiry in which we are concerned with the assessment of theories; however for Peirce abduction had its proper place in the context of discovery:

‘(a)bduction is the process of forming explanatory hypotheses. It is the only logical operation which introduces a new idea.’ [Peirce 5(1960): p 172]

For him, induction and deduction come into play at the later stages of theory assessment. This viewpoint is controversial with heated debate about its validity. Abduction is supposed to be part of the logic of science, but what is *logical* about guessing or inventing explanatory hypotheses? According to Peirce abduction belongs to logic because it can be given a schematic characterization:

‘The surprising fact, C, is observed.

But if A were true, C would be a matter of course.

Hence, there is reason to suspect that A is true.’ [based on Peirce 5 (1960): p 189]

However this is not an inference that leads to any new idea. The explanatory hypothesis A must have occurred before we infer that there is reason that A is true. In a critique of Peirce’s thoughts, Frankfurt (1958) argued that this form of abduction was not about *inventing* hypothesis but rather one of *adopting* hypothesis, where the adoption of the hypothesis is not as being true or verified or confirmed, but as being a worthy candidate for further investigation. The brand strategists claim that “taking care” was a worthy candidate for development as a strategy was the taking up of a stance that warranted further investigation – although not too much in this particular case. Frankfurt (1958) went on to ultimately reject the notion of abduction as of not being much use in the process of selection further feeding into the heated debate that rages around the notion of abduction.

There have been some attempts to revisit Peirce’s notion of abduction: ‘the crucial function of a pattern of abduction consists in its function as a search strategy which leads us, for a given kind of scenario, in a reasonable time to a most promising explanatory conjecture which is then subject to further test’ [Schurz (2008): p 205]. The notion of guessing and then justifying seems to make sense for me in my own practice and also what I observe, linking it to Peirce’s notion of *best* explanation. What I am trying to bring attention to is the fact that the process is by no means logical, smooth or indeed consistent; that there are educated guesses that we make and then retrofit a narrative to make the argument seem plausible and logical.

Certainty and Vagueness

Eisenberg (1984) points to the notion that concepts of organisations changed significantly in the 1980s with participants being considered as thinking individuals with identifiable goals [Argyris & Schon (1978), Harris & Cronen (1979), Pfeffer (1981), Smircich (1983), Weick (1978)]. Eisenberg focuses on the perspective of an optimal model of communication within these groups to ascertain joint action, but he dismisses the overemphasis on clarity and openness as the norm. Clarity, and conversely ambiguity, is not an attribute of messages, it is a relational variable that arises through a process of interrelating in a context. He contends that strategic ambiguity is useful in an organisation in that it promotes unified diversity, it fosters the existence of multiple viewpoints in organisations and encourages a discourse on abstractions without limiting specific interpretations. He also suggests that strategic ambiguity can be useful if one has to deny an intent.

The dominant leadership literature points to a leader that leads with authority and precision. This notion of certainty had been a feature of the natural sciences until the questions provoked by thinking on complexity and chaos. In a management sense, certainty seems to me not to leave any scope for “otherness” for other ideas. In an increasingly complex organisational world it is also not always clear what we must do:

‘It has become less apparent where problem centres lie, and less apparent where and how we should intervene even if we do happen to know what aims we seek By now we are all beginning to realize that one of the most intractable problems is that of defining problems and of locating problems.’

[Rittel & Webber (1973): p xx]

Philosophers’ interest in uncertainty and vagueness has largely stemmed from concerns regarding the regimentation of natural language in formal logic: arguments that may look good in virtue of their linguistic form may be very wrong if the words or phrases are equivocal. ‘No man means all he says, and very few say all they mean, for words are slippery and thought is viscous.’ [Brooks-Adam (1907)]. Peirce and Wittgenstein both understood that vagueness and ambiguity are not defects in

language but essential properties that enable it to accommodate anything and everything that people need to say. Formal languages such as logic and computer languages aim for precision, but even after debugging the result may not be what is required or what is interpreted – more generally the precision and clarity that is required is achieved through a process of dialogue, negotiation, ambiguity and intermediate stages of trial and error. And even then precision and clarity of function are debatable. In the precision and clarity that appears to be the requirement of a vision or mission statement and clearly articulated strategy, there is a level of abstraction and generalization that is inevitable for us to make sense of what it is that we are trying to do. Peirce learned the difficulty of stating any general principle with absolute precision:

‘It is easy to speak with precision upon a general theme. Only, one must commonly surrender all ambition to be certain. It is equally easy to be certain. One has only to be sufficiently vague. It is not difficult to be pretty precise and fairly certain at once about a very narrow subject.’ [Peirce (1931): p 237]

This is also echoed in quantum physics as Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle, which asserts a fundamental limit to the precision with which certain pairs of physical properties of a particle can be known simultaneously. Wittgenstein (1921) restricted the legitimate use of language to precisely defined mappings from sentences to configurations of objects in the world; but later, Wittgenstein (1953) asserted the opposite when faced with the full complexity of language as it is used in everyday life. He observed that words do not have a fixed boundary defined by necessary and sufficient conditions. As an alternative he suggested the term ‘family resemblances’ for the ‘complicated network of overlapping and criss-crossing similarities, in the large and the small.’ [Wittgenstein (1952): p 66].

‘One might say that the concept ‘game’ is a concept with blurred edges – “But is a blurred concept a concept at all?” – Is an indistinct photograph a picture of a person at all? Is it even always an advantage to replace an indistinct picture with a sharp one? Isn’t the indistinct one often exactly what we need? Frege compares a concept to an area and says that an area with vague boundaries cannot be called an area at all. This presumably means that we

cannot do anything with it. – But is it senseless to say: “Stand roughly (ungefähr) there”?’ [Wittgenstein (1951): p 71]

Peirce and Wittgenstein recognized that all measurements have a margin of error or granularity, which must be taken into account at every step from design to implementation. The option of vagueness enables language to accommodate the inevitable vagueness in observations and the plans that are based on them. This makes the notion of a precise vision statement or indeed strategy not of much. I would also argue that, if precision and clarity were indeed possible, it would limit creativity.

Vagueness is an important term in philosophy with Bertrand Russell stating ‘I should like, if time were longer and if I knew more than I do, to spend a whole lecture on the conception of vagueness. I think vagueness is very much more important in the theory of knowledge than you would ever judge it to be from the writings of most people.’ [Russell (1922): papers 9: 147-54]. In 1923 he published his papers on vagueness bringing attention to it as an area for study. Many argued that ‘Russell helped to make technical sense (of the concept of vagueness) canonical’ and that ‘with him, the problem of vagueness is systematically presented for the first time in something close to its current form’ [Williamson (1994): p, 37]. Vagueness is often linked to borderline cases, where there is doubt in the meaning. There are three aspects of language that are held to be distinct: generality; vagueness; and ambiguity. A term is said to be general if it is possible for there to be a multiplicity of objects denoted by it, while it preserves the same “meaning”. A term is said to be ambiguous if it is really two terms which are identical in phonetic, written or image form, or if it has a number of different “senses” or “meanings” connected with it. A term is said to be vague if there exist objects such that it is not possible to decide, even when given all the relevant evidence, whether the objects are denoted by a term or not. Irving Copilowish (1939) argues that vagueness is a special case of ambiguity rather than a distinct property. He argues that an ambiguous term is usually thought to have a number of distinct and easily distinguished “meanings” or designate. The kind of ambiguity that is associated with vagueness is not easily resolved. Whereas ambiguity can lead to a multiple of understandings, vagueness can lead to understandings that have yet to be defined. I would argue that in a strategy that allows for creativity and

innovation there are already aspects of ambiguity and vagueness present, and that these should be embraced.

By nature when we go from the particular to the general there is an abstraction that has to take place and hence some vagueness is inherent. But we try to manage at general levels with notions of certainty. In some respects these are essential in managing our own anxieties, but we need to ensure that we do not make them rigid and dogmatic; there has to be an allowance for local interpretations and adaptation if we are to allow for creativity and novelty. This becomes a rather paradoxical situation in which we are managing for certainty at one level and vagueness at another, but it is in this embrace that we can perhaps make sense of creative action in organisations.

Notions of certainty and vagueness are also challenged when we go from the general to the particular and vice versa. In the process of strategizing we have to make simplistic statements about the general, which do not, and cannot, capture the complexities of the particular. At this level of abstraction there is already a built in level of lack of detail that is often masked in the current management practice of key performance indicators and targets that are often abstract in themselves, yet are taken as precise. There is some comfort to be had in certainty, especially when linked to anxiety about the future. Weber's concept of the iron cage in industrial society provides the backdrop for an understanding of both uncertainty and control as the growth of sophisticated bureaucracies was supposed to remove anxiety from everyday life and risk assessment and risk management became big business. Although risk calculations are about making the 'incalculable calculable' [Beck (1992): p 100] at the same time the inexplicable grows and anxieties grow. There are many forms of anxiety, from day-to-day to serious psychological disorders, but we live with anxiety every day. There is anxiety that is to do with simply not knowing what is going to happen in the future; there is anxiety around specific events such as tests or performance anxiety; there is social anxiety and stranger anxiety; there is existential anxiety. Working in an art and design school I am very conscious of the role that anxiety plays in the creative act. I would also argue that anxiety is essential for reflexivity to take place, so that if we are constantly changing then we are constantly dealing with anxiety. So certain types of anxiety are important in creative action. Certainty around certain goals, especially when they become the model for reality,

often means that we end up managing to those goals rather than managing the situation. Living with certainty and vagueness at the same time is what we already do and yet we try to assume that this is not the case in organisational life. According to Kierkegaard anxiety is always an expression of freedom, it serves as the middle term between innocence and guilt, between possibility and actuality: ‘entangled freedom, where freedom is not free itself but entangled, not by necessity but in itself’ [Kierkegaard (1980a): p 49]. If we are to link brand strategy in organisational life to the dynamic processes of identity formation then there must be some anxiety in the process otherwise there is no space for reflexivity and hence creative action.

My Practice

A key issue that emerges from the research for me personally is the dynamic that goes on around the newcomer, how they are taken up and the heightened importance of each act that takes place. I am conscious of how I felt and behaved though the process of a new vice chancellor coming in and constantly think, pay attention to, and analyse what I think might be happening around me as the newcomer in my new job. There is increasing attention paid to the personality type of the individual leader and leadership styles – recently focusing on psychopathic tendencies [Jackall (1988); Babiak & Hare (2007)]. What this does highlight is the importance of the individual in the process. This also brings to attention the fact that it is difficult to generalize from case studies of process alone without paying attention to the individuals in the group. The particular people at the University reacted in a certain way because of who they were, as did the vice chancellors. My role as head of school is affected by my personality and approach, so although we may broadly follow the same process, because of our individuality there will be different outcomes. Although this makes it difficult to generalize, it is possible to recognize patterns in what may occur and hence there is learning in looking at these processes, but as Geertz said, they need to be thick descriptions to provide a richer understanding of the context, and the realization that the individuals make a difference and are not anonymous. Through these thick descriptions we can get a better understanding of what is going on. As Margaret Mead once said: “Just remember that you are unique. Just like everybody else.”

I pay constant attention to the simplifications that I am making and how people respond to them. At one level this has made for perhaps a more stilted set of conversations and perhaps hesitancy around decision-making. I am keenly aware that people, for example Gary, have a very strong expectation that a leader should lead. This becomes a balance of judgment, based on experience, guess work, empathy and awareness. Identity is not just a construct but is a fundamental to understanding social life – who we are and how we fit in. It plays out in so many aspects of organisational life, so while I acknowledge the role of a brand identity for an organisation, I also acknowledge that organisational identity is so much more.

In my day-to-day dealings with staff and faculty, I find that I have become more patient in my expectations, hopefully without seeming fatalistic. I am more observant of how my gestures are being taken up and possibly interpreted and I find myself engaging people in perhaps longer dialogue than they are used to. I need to be careful to some extent here, because not everyone wants to talk about what is going on between us – some just want to be told what to do. I am conscious that I am making judgments based on my experience and trying to read the situation. As a newcomer in a new job, in a new country I am much more aware, and perhaps less naïve about the expectations that my role brings. Am I more paranoid? Perhaps. Am I more measured in my conversations? Perhaps. But I am certainly more attentive. I still have intentions, but I include them as part of the narrative in an optimistic and eager way rather than in a didactic way.

Contribution

The research started out in an attempt to look at branding practices in organisations. This is a very common practice in companies, and almost an expected first act of a newcomer – an attempt to assert their authority, vision and personality onto the organisation. This research has looked at branding as a social act by focusing on the complex responsive processes of relating. These highlight the obvious that is often overlooked in the literature – that people are people and therefore do not always behave as we think they might. The research highlights the importance of context and in particular the notion of habitus, which enables and constrains our actions and abilities. Most of the branding literature takes a scientific approach to the application

of the strategy – the propositions are logically induced or deduced from the data presented and then applied to the organisation, regardless of what is possible. It is seen as a command model in which the brand strategy is then vigilantly applied in a mono-dimensional way. This research contributes to the literature by presenting a socio-political viewpoint of organisational branding and some of the ways in which it is taken up, or not, by the organisation. It presents a more dynamic viewpoint in which identity is constantly being negotiated rather than statically presented.

The other area of contribution is to the literature on newcomers. It so happened that the timing of the research was about executive newcomers and some of the dynamics of how they are received in an organisation. It highlights the expectations, the struggles for power and recognition, and the inevitable gossip, disappointments and highs that result from the arrival of the newcomer. The simple act of a newcomer has an impact on the identity dynamics in the organisation, and with in an executive role, these can be quite profound having repercussions on people who have been confidently doing their jobs for years.

The research also continues the tradition of exploration into complex responsive processes of relating. It presents another example of a personal narrative that aims to take a critical management approach to understanding organisational life. It is eclectic by nature and should have resonance for any practitioner involved in identity formation in organisations – ie all of us, but especially those who come into an organisation and expect to make significant changes without an understanding of the dynamics and complexities of organisational identity formation.

Conclusions

This research starts by making some fundamental assertions about how we see the world and encourages us, using a critical management theory approach, to pay attention to what is going on around us rather than what we think should be going on around us. This challenges the notion of change, the notion of intentions and the notion of certainty. It also challenges the notions of management prescriptions and generalizations. I also hope to bring into focus the paradoxes that we face in organisational life. Although the research indicates that every single moment and scenario is different and that the micro-interactions are different and can result in significantly different outcomes not only in different contexts but even in the same context, there are still patterns that are applicable to our lives. If we did not make these generalizations, everyday life would become very cumbersome, long-winded and full of anxiety. So although we have to make generalizations from the particular I am conscious that these not be taken up as prescriptions of the way things should be done, but more of as a way of looking at processes of inter-relating and noticing what goes on as we make our way in the world. I am not arguing that everything is emergent, nor am I arguing that intention drives the organisation. I am arguing that there is both intention and emergence at the same time and that holding onto this paradox may be useful. Life is indeed familiar and unfamiliar at the same time, it is full of paradoxes. Paying attention to some of these may help us in our own sensemaking.

The theme of the overall thesis is a focus on the processes of identity formation when a senior newcomer comes to an organisation. The thesis brings attention to the idealised way in which organisational identity is homogenised and branded and how this covers over what more fully occurs. The dominant discourse presents a rational view of organisational change in which the leader operates in a rational world, but this research shows that the situation is far from rational. The research points out that organisational change is much more complex and diffuse than can be captured in any one single, logically constructed theory. By focusing on the role of the newcomer – often a clear change in organisational identity – the research shows that the processes of identification are clearly very emotional and particularly heightened when there is a

senior newcomer in the organisation. The first narrative was when I was the senior newcomer and came in unaware of the idealised expectations, the emotions and the anxieties that would be present, purely by being a newcomer. I was surprised when the choice of whom I spoke to or became close to had significant ramifications and how gossip developed rapidly. In the third narrative this is particularly clear to me as I am one of the expectant people and am now much more attentive to what is going on around me, both from my own perspective of change and anxiety, and also picking up what is happening for others, through their conversations, gossip and actions.

The social sciences construction of reality does not adequately explain the emotional processes that are ongoing and these are especially not covered in the management literature. What I am bringing attention to is that instrumental reason and the dominance of data-driven decisions does not adequately deal with issues of an emotional nature – these cannot be decided in terms of efficiency or cost-benefit analysis without significant impact on the well-being of the group and the organisation.

The contribution of this thesis to the understanding of organisational change can be summarized in these four broad themes:

THE NEWCOMER AS PRACTICE

The newcomer experiences processes of power negotiation much more explicitly and openly than perhaps in other situations and at this stage in an organisation levels of fantasy and anxiety are high. In this study I bring attention to how organisational identities are forming and how they inevitably influence the participation of the newcomer. The newcomer cannot not be in the role – they are not acting ‘on’ the organisation, but are ‘in’ the organisation, both forming it and being formed by it – as we all are, but the newcomer is particularly under the spotlight. The newcomer needs to be keenly aware that processes of inter-relating are significantly more complex and indeterminable than the dominant discourse would have us believe. People will have developed fantasies even before the physical arrival of the newcomer, and as soon as the newcomer starts to interact these fantasies will either be met, magnified or result in significant disappointments. As soon as the newcomer starts to ‘act’ then the sincerity of their rhetoric will start to become clearer.

This resonates somewhat with the 90 day theory of organisational change but also differs in that it highlights that the first 90 days are important not in the sense of getting things done, but in the sense that we reveal intentions. It is interesting to note that it really was the first three months of the new Vice Chancellor's term that revealed not only intentions but also a way of working and thinking. It would seem that being a newcomer requires practice and attention. One of the key aspects is that of paying attention to the particular situation. Over the course of the narratives I am struck by what I was paying attention to and how this changed as I progressed through the research. When joining University XX I was very conscious of the situational context, the particular academic history and the academic portfolio. I was even aware of some of the tribal dynamics. But I did not pay that much attention to the emotional context of the organisation and of the group. At University YY I think I was much more aware of the emotional context – this could have to do with the fact that I was walking into a redundancy situation and so knew that it would be an emotional process, but in any case, my practice as a newcomer was significantly better than at University XX. The key issue bears around the homogeneity of approach that is presented as organisational change, especially when a new leader is brought in to make the change. Most research has shown that although this is the key aim of bringing in newcomers, in most cases it is not successful. The context has to be taken into account, in its broadest way. The notion of paying attention to what is really going on around is very important. This does take time and practice. At one level most higher education is essentially the same, but when one gets into the particular it is profoundly different. One needs to pay attention to the 'uncanny' ie the familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. One could argue that an art school is an art school – but the research shows that this is not the case. Each has its own personality and way of working, albeit within a broader institution understanding of higher education. Certainly some of the academic processes and committees are slightly different, but these can be learned very quickly. The harder part is making sense of the identity formation that is on going in the group. This is a complex process that has social, psychological, philosophical and emotional aspects that require the newcomer to be aware that this is a particularly sensitive situation and also one in which simple gestures can be taken up in many ways, not all intended. One also has to be aware that these processes of identity formation also have an impact on the practitioner.

The etymology of the word occupation is from the Latin *occupare*, to occupy, to take up space or time. The newcomer ‘occupies’ the role and is very much a key part of the role. In narrative two, the Vice Chancellor occupied the role as he thought it should be, denying that he was actually in it. In narrative four, the new Vice Chancellor very much occupies the role and brings her own specific style, nature and personality to it. This has profound impact on the group, how we feel and how we make sense of who we are as a group and ourselves individually.

Occupation has both a spatial and temporal sense to it – not only do we occupy the role, we also need to be present. It is clear in narrative three that absence has a significant affect on the emotional life of the group. The first Vice Chancellor had been in post for two decades and people were very used to not necessarily seeing him around, but for myself and the new Vice Chancellor, we were still new and relationships were still being formed. Being present was much more necessary. It was also necessary to be present during a very emotional time.

PROCESSES OF EMOTIONS AND ANXIETIES

The emotional dimension is used here in its broadest sense and not in the sense of just *feelings*; while it includes feelings, it is not limited to just this sense of the word emotional. Decisions driven purely by data and logic do not adequately deal with issues of an emotional nature – these cannot be decided in terms of efficiency or cost-benefit analysis without significant impact on the well-being of the group and the organisation. The newcomer process is particularly stressful and full of anxiety, but I also want to argue that there is good anxiety and bad anxiety. Kierkegaard talked about the notion of creative anxiety: that anxiety was needed so that we could change – after all, without anxiety why would we pay attention to certain things and change? Anxiety is therefore in all processes to some extent. The anxieties that are present during the introduction of a newcomer include existential anxieties that challenge one’s own role in the organisation. For some this is a real challenge to their understanding of who they are. One of the key factors in narrative four that caused anxiety was the inconsistency in decision-making. Whereas in narrative two the consistency of decision-making caused other anxieties, for the newcomer to come in and present such an inconsistent and unconfident way of sensemaking had a

significant effect on the group, as I am sure it did on the newcomer. But how does one behave consistently but still remain flexible enough to listen to other viewpoints and be able to improvise in the situation? As a newcomer the ability to manage one's own anxieties is very important if we are not to make an already hypersensitive situation worse. This requires a greater awareness of ourselves in the process. High degrees of reflexivity are required from both the group and the newcomer. This is more than just empathy for the group, but also the ability to hold on to our own anxiety and the anxiety of the group. It is a matter of judgment when abstractions are useful and indeed required and when contradictions and complexities should be maintained. It is also a matter of judgment when one decides to speak and act. Consistency between the message and the action is important for many reasons, but the newcomer process has greater risks of anxiety creation for the wrong reasons. The newcomer has not only to pay attention to what they say and the way that they say it, but also to what they do. They are particularly under the spotlight in these stages.

What I am paying attention to here is that the practice of a newcomer in a group is a reflexive process, and by nature of reflexive processes is an emotional process in which levels and types of anxieties are particularly heightened. The practitioner needs to pay attention to these reflexive processes both for themselves and the group.

CONTRADICTIONS, AMBIGUITY AND VAGUENESS

The focus on chaos theory and complexity theory and the challenges to certainty have been well documented, but what has not been explored is a shift towards the notion of vagueness in organisational life. No document or procedure can capture all of the elements that need to be managed; there is always space for functionalization and for individuals to bring their own particular sensemaking to the process. In the same way the notion of vagueness I believe is useful for the newcomer to allow for local differences and interpretations to emerge. Beyond a defensive strategy in which the newcomer can deny how the meanings are taken up, vagueness is a useful way for providing a space for creative action. A prescriptive approach allows very little space for creative action. It is interesting to note that in all of the narratives there is both certainty and vagueness present, no matter how things were articulated by the Vice Chancellors. I am now much more aware of the usefulness of vagueness as a strategy as a newcomer, it allows some semblance of certainty, whether it is around process or

decisions, or sensemaking, but also allows for space for input. This is still a judgment act in that one needs to be paying attention to what is going on around us and what we are being vague about. There are expectations that we will lead, but there is also the expectation, certainly in modern organisational life, that we will be collaborative and open to other ideas and diversity. One needs to be aware that there are significant differences between contradictions, ambiguities and vagueness. Contradictions and ambiguities can lead to inconsistencies and hence greater anxiety, but are clearer to understand, and indeed make. Vagueness on the other hand, is a much more elusive philosophical term which allows both a level of certainty and a level of opportunity to co-exist. I would argue that this is an aspect for all creative action, but is of particular note during newcomer processes as a way of socializing in the group.

MY PRACTICE

The literature for the development of identity in the individual is rich and varied [Mead (1934); Giddens (1991); Burkitt (1991); Goffman (1959); Elias & Schotter (1991); Habermas (1979); Nietzsche (2004)] and provides the foundation for a more dynamic understanding of how we are continuously becoming who we are – being formed as well as forming. There has also been some attention paid to organisational identity and brand identity [Dutton & Dukerich (1991); Brown & Starkey (2000); Albert & Whetton (1985); Christensen (2001)] but there has been little that looks at the confluence of these two approaches and, more specifically what happens in an organisation when there is a senior newcomer. Emotions, anxieties and politics are particularly heightened at this time, yet the literature does not specifically deal with this very significant stage in organisational change beyond a homogenized, prescriptive approach.

This research started out looking at identity formation from the researcher's perspective as a brand strategist, albeit one with serious reservations about the process. By focusing on what was actually going on at a micro-level and what was actually going on between people in the organisation – to them, their sense of self, the collective selves, anxiety and other real aspects – it is clear that the simplistic branding process is inadequate for the modern organisation. There are parallels between the sociological understanding of how identity forms in the individual and what is happening in the organisation. Mead (1934) in particular provides a good

basis with some parallels of the “I-me” dialectic with what is being played out in the organisation with respects to the intent of the organisation and the articulated representation of this, which also varies from context to context, and we only know once we act. For the newcomer this construction needs to be well understood if they are to be aware of the many processes of identification and working together going on around them.

Working together is a practice in which there are rituals, traditions, politics, power and ways of engaging. What I am pointing at in this research is that a senior executive coming into an organisation is a subtly different process in which many of the socio-political and emotional processes are particularly heightened and so the newcomer needs to pay more specific attention to what is really going on. For my own practice I find that I am much more attentive to not only the technical aspects of being a senior executive in the organisation, but also, as a newcomer that I will have a major disruptive influence on the organisation. I am more keenly aware of processes of identification for individuals and groups and the emotional state in which I sense them. I am very much aware of not only the sensemaking that I am expected to bring, but also the care, the nurturing and wellbeing aspects of my responsibilities to the group. With the increasing number of short-term contracts, I find that my practice as a newcomer has profoundly changed, I feel that I am better equipped at making sense of the group and paying attention to the complex processes or resistance, power dynamics, irrationality, collusion, expectation, anxiety and conspiracy all playing out. This does not guarantee success, but my attention is significantly improved as has my practice and understanding of identity formation in groups. Practice is something we have to do and keep doing, and perhaps we will get better at it. Paying attention is the start, and the more I practice paying attention the better I get at it.

In summary, the contribution of this thesis to the understanding of organisational change is:

1. To bring attention to the idealised way that organisational identity is homogenized and branded and how this covers over what more fully occurs. The thesis shows that the negotiations that take place between intention and what is actually emerging are complex, not deterministic nor rational. This is

not to say that strategies and intentions play no role, they absolutely do, but that it is a socio-political process of negotiation and improvisation. The generalized solutions that are often presented without acknowledgment of context are problematic and one needs to constantly pay attention to the particular and the general at the same time.

2. By drawing attention to how organisational identities are forming and how this inevitably influences the participation of the practitioner. What I mean by this is that the practitioner affects the processes of identification, but is also affected themselves by the process of identification – one is not immune to habitus. The practitioner is formed while also forming the organisational strategies and identities in the organisation; it is a reflexive process for all. The practitioner needs to be very aware that they occupy the role with all of the expectations of what that role should be, and that they are very much ‘in’ the role as themselves.
3. The transition period when a newcomer comes into an organisation is a distinct period in organisational life when emotions, anxieties and fantasies are particularly high. The emotional aspect of the organisation is not adequately covered in the management literature but plays a significant role in this transition period. This makes newcomer processes subtly different from the everyday processes in which we work together and negotiate joint action. The newcomer needs to be aware that there are distinct expectations of this transition theatre in which power, identities and status are being negotiated. This is hugely emotional and it is essential that the newcomer consciously occupies the role and acknowledges the theatre inherent in this transition period.
4. “Paying attention” is an easy statement to make, but requires constant attention and practice. It is a discipline in which we have to constantly check ourselves and our prejudices so that we pay attention to what is really going on and not how we may synoptically gloss over things and assume what is going on. This is of course also a balancing act – if we pay attention and review everything it could be debilitating, causing greater anxiety for ourselves and others.

The newcomer transition is an act in which intentions interact with processes of power negotiations, recognition, emotions, control, and anxieties; we improvise as we act into the unknown in a constant negotiation of strategies and identities in which we are both forming and are formed.

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